The *New York Times* Best-Selling Series

SWEET TOOTH

Jeff Lemire

WILD GAME

"An emotionally gripping conclusion to Jeff Lemire's fantastic series."

—*IGN*

VERTIGO

SWEET TOOTH

WILD GAME

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WILD GAME

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DC Comics, 1700 Broadway, New York, NY 10019
A Warner Bros. Entertainment Company

PREVIOUSLY

A decade ago a horrible disease raged across the world killing billions. Afterwards it spawned a new breed of human/animal hybrid children...the only children born since the plague.

GUS is one such hybrid. A young boy with a sweet soul, a sweeter tooth — and the features of a deer. After his father died and Gus finally left the seclusion of his forest home, Gus hooked up with a hulking and violent drifter named JEPPERD.

While held captive by a brutal militia researching the plague's origins, Gus learned he may have actually been born *before* the sickness began. Now Gus and Jepperd are heading north toward Alaska, hoping to uncover Gus's history and with it the source of the plague.

As they've traveled, the two were joined by a motley group of survivors, including rescued prostitute BECKY, former hockey champ JIMMY and three more hybrid children — the lovable ground-hog boy BOBBY, the sweet pig-girl WENDY and Jimmy's mostly animalistic crow-boy companion. For a time the group traveled with plague researcher DR. SINGH, but Singh went on ahead when he became obsessed with Gus's past and an incoherent religious text written by the boy's father.

The travelers make their way ever closer to the source of the plague, unaware that a crew from the militia is following behind, bringing with them Jepperd's hybrid son, whom Jepperd believes to be dead...

THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES OF THE BIG MAN AND THE BOY

. . .The Big Man had sat alone in the Dam for nearly three days, barely talking to anyone. Then, on the third day when the blizzard finally passed, he set out with only The Nice Lady's body and a shovel.

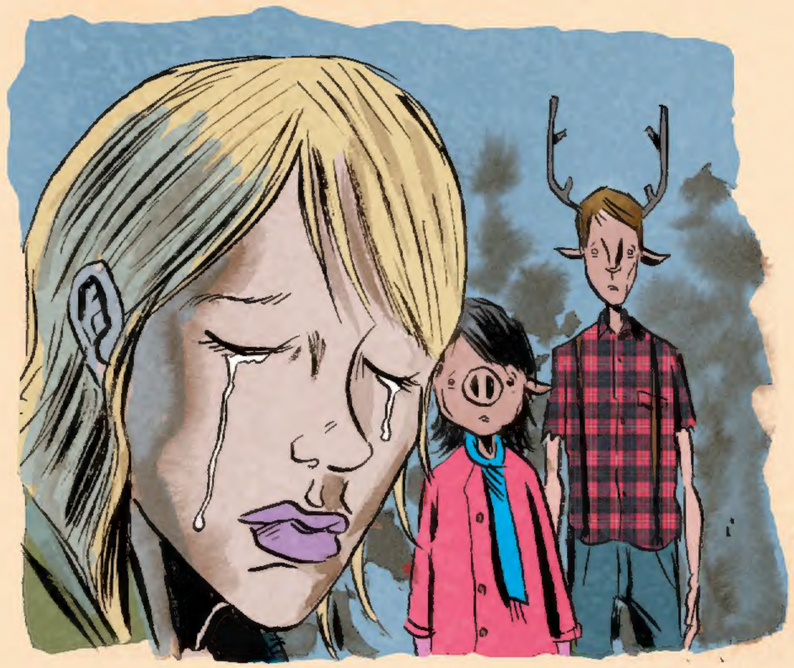
The Boy wanted to follow, but he knew that The Big Man needed to do this alone. . .

Digging The Nice Lady's grave was hard work. The ground outside was frozen solid. But The Big Man was nothing if not strong and determined. He had chosen a pretty spot to lay her to rest. It was under a nice old Oak tree. The others didn't know it, but this wasn't the first time The Big Man had laid a woman he had loved to rest under such a tree.

That afternoon, they all gathered around and put The Nice Lady back into the earth. No one said much. There wasn't much left to say. She had been their friend, their mother and their sister. She had been strong and brave. And now she was gone.

The Little Boy and The Pig Girl had spent the morning carving a marker (they didn't like the word tombstone) for her grave out of a tabletop from The Dam. The Pretty Girl had helped to spell all the words. It wasn't a fancy thing, but The Nice Lady would have liked it anyway.

It was sturdy and simple, just like her.



That night they decided not to be sad anymore. The Pretty Girl told them that The Nice Lady wouldn't have wanted them to waste any more time crying.
She said that they all may only have a little time left, and they should be happy.

The funny thing was, even though she had said those very words, The Pretty Girl was the saddest of all of them that night. She had sat off alone, staring into the fire. She had known The Nice Lady the longest, and they had been like sisters. And now she would be alone. As the night went on, the children noticed her head off to the gravesite. They could hear her talking to The Nice Lady.

The Big Man seemed changed though. Something had been lifted from his shoulders. He had brought a new friend to them. And for the first time in a long time, he smiled and laughed. Maybe he didn't feel quite so alone anymore. Maybe he was happy to have someone else to share his load.

They sang and danced and played games well into the night. Eventually, The Pretty Girl came back and joined in.

Then they all slept better than they had in a long, long time.

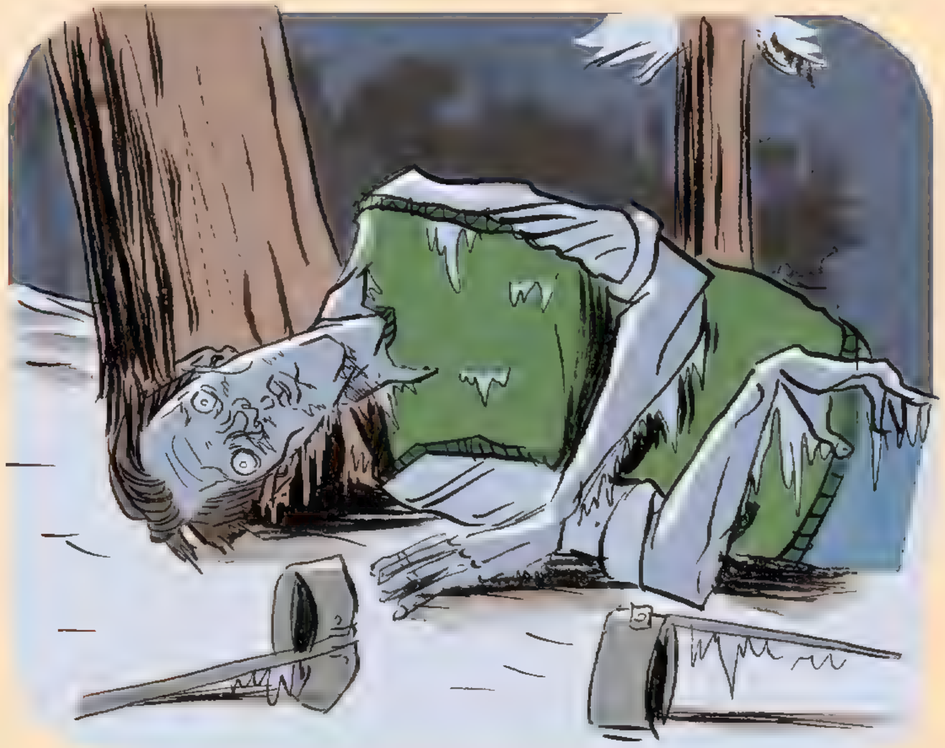
The Big Man wasn't the only one to make a new friend. The Crow-Boy had had come along too, and the other children loved him. He couldn't talk, but he could fly and squawk and he was a lot of fun. They all spent the next few days playing games and being kids.

Later that week, The Big Man and his new friend went to see The Evergreen People. They told them that it was safe to go home. They told them that The Liar was gone and they didn't need to be scared anymore.

The Big Man struck a deal with them. He told The Evergreen People that they could have the Dam back as long as The Big Man could take their last truck. They all agreed and shook on it, just like people used to in the old days before everyone got sick, and people stopped being nice to each other.

But then, on the way back to The Dam, they came across The Liar! But it was clear just by looking at him that he wasn't never gonna lie to no one ever again.

Even though this made The Big Man happy, he was glad the children weren't there to see it.



But, as nice as things were going, nothing could have prepared the gang for what happened the next day...

WAIT, EXPLAIN THIS TO ME AGAIN... HE'S GOTTA *HIBERNATE?*

YEAH. THE DOC EXPLAINED IT ALL TO ME A WHILE BACK. IT'S PART OF HIS NATURAL CYCLE OR SOMETHING.

HE PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE DONE IT EARLIER IN THE WINTER, BUT WITH ALL THE CRAP WE BEEN DOING, HE COULDN'T. ANYWAY, I GUESS IT'S TIME NOW.

BUT, BOBBY... DON'T YOU WANNA COME WITH US TO ALASKA?

BOBBY AM LOVE GUS AND WENDY. BUT BOBBY AM SO TIRED.

BOBBY AM NEED TO REST LONG.

I'M GONNA MISS YOU, BOBBY.

BOBBY AM MISS GUSSY BIG TIME.

ARE YOU SURE?

YEAH, MAN... I'M SURE. TRUTH IS, JEPPERD... I'M JUST TIRED. TIRED OF RUNNING AND HIDING.

AND WITH WALTER GONE, THIS PLACE IS AS GOOD AS IT GETS.

YOU SURE *YOU* WON'T RECONSIDER? THE EVERGREENS SAID WE CAN ALL STAY IF WE WANT.

NAH... WE GOTTA KEEP GOING.

THE KID WANTS TO GO NORTH...

...I OWE IT TO HIM.

'SIDES, YOU KNOW ME. I'D GO STIR CRAZY IN A WEEK WITHOUT SOMEONE TO BEAT UP.

SEE YA, FOUR-EYES.

LATER, GOLDILOCKS.

LOOK, JOHNNY...WITHOUT YOU I NEVER WOULD'A--

SAVE IT, BIG GUY. SAPPY AIN'T YOUR STYLE.

YEAH, I GUESS NOT.

JUST BE CAREFUL. EVENTUALLY SOMEONE ELSE IS GOING TO FIND THIS PLACE, AND WHEN THEY DO...

WHEN THEY DO, MAYBE WE'LL LET THEM IN, AND MAYBE EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY.

YEAH... MAYBE.

And so they said their goodbyes and headed north...

OH, WE'RE ON THE WAY, WE'RE ON THE WAY, ON THE WAY TO GRANDPA'S FARM! I SAY WE'RE ON THE WAY; WE'RE ON THE WAY TO GRANDPA'S FARM!

They drove and drove, but The Fat Man kept them busy. He liked to sing, and before long The Little Boy and The Pig Girl joined in. And for the first time in a long time, they weren't just happy, but they were having fun!

AND DOWN ON GRANDPA'S FARM THERE IS A BIG BROWN COW, AND THAT COW HE SOUNDS A LOT LIKE THIS...

MOOOOOO!

OH, WE'RE ON THE WAY, WE'RE ON THE WAY, ON THE WAY TO GRANDPA'S FARM! I SAY WE'RE ON THE WAY, WE'RE ON THE WAY TO GRANDPA'S FARM...

AND DOWN ON GRANDPA'S FARM THERE IS A BIG BLACK CROW, AND THAT CROW HE SOUNDS A LOT LIKE THIS...

KA-KAW!

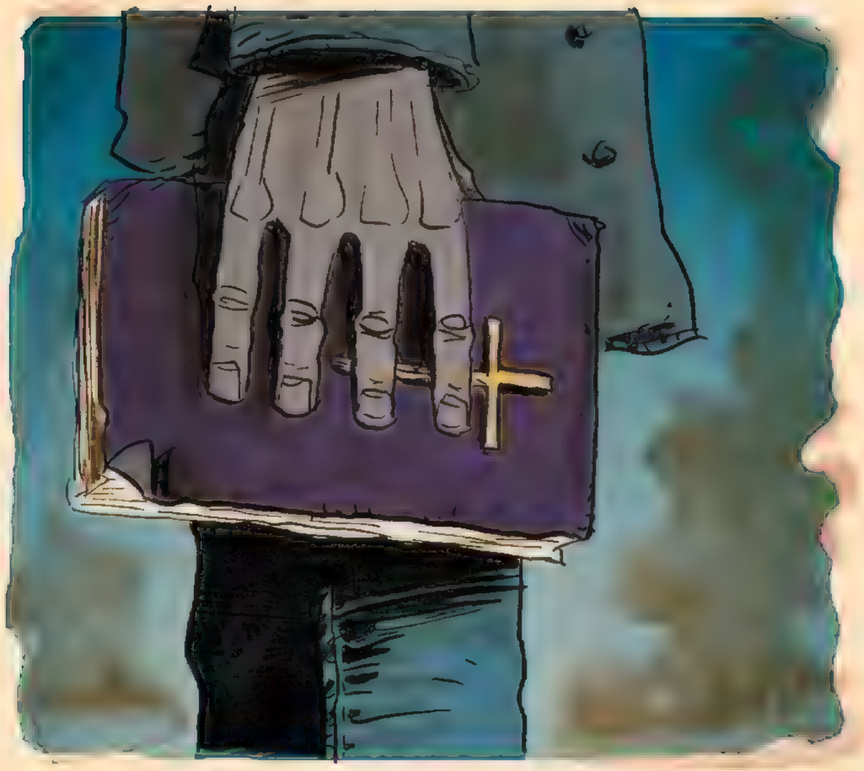
OH, WE'RE ON THE WAY, WE'RE ON THE WAY, ON THE WAY TO GRANDPA'S FARM! I SAY WE'RE ON THE WAY, WE'RE ON THE WAY TO GRANDPA'S FARM...

AND DOWN ON GRANDPA'S FARM THERE IS A LITTLE PINK PIG, AND THAT PIGGY SHE SOUNDS A LOT LIKE THIS...

OINK! OINK!

And The Little Boy wasn't sure, but he could swear he even saw The Big Man smile in the rear view mirror.

So they drove and drove. . . it would take them a long time to reach Alaska. . . but somehow they knew they'd be okay if they could just keep smiling.



. . .Speaking of Alaska, The Doctor had arrived. After The Little Boy had escaped, he had had no other choice than to keep going on his own. He knew if he went back, The Big Man would surely kill him for what he'd done.

It was a shame that The Little Boy couldn't be here. The Doctor was sure he'd need him to find the secrets he sought, but he also was confident that The Boy would arrive eventually. It was his destiny, after all.

And, The Doctor had managed to get The Bible back from The Boy before he escaped, so everything wasn't lost.

As he searched the dark, cold town a feeling of utter anticipation grew in The Doctor's belly. He knew. . .he just knew that the answers were here, just waiting to be discovered.

Up until now he had thought he was meant to be The Prophet of a new age, but now he started to wonder if he had been wrong. Maybe he was the one destined to become the Messiah himself!

The Doctor's journey was not the only one of note. You see The Bad Man was hot on their trail. In fact he was just arriving at The Dam, only hours behind The Gang. Worst of all, The Bad Man still had The Big Man's son captive. He was sad and confused and just wanted to be free. But that was never going to happen.

The Dog-Boys were there too, and they were excellent trackers. They could smell The Little Boy all over the Dam. The Bad Man wasted no time. He had his army blow the doors in and they stormed The Dam. The Bad Man expected to find The Gang inside, but instead came face to face with his little brother.

The Bad Man knew it would only be a matter of time before his little brother told him where The Big Man and The Little Boy were headed. He'd make him tell if he had to . . .

A few hours north, The Big Man couldn't sleep. Maybe he could sense that the hardest part of their journey would soon be upon them...

HEY KID, CAN'T SLEEP?

NOPE.

ME NEITHER.

--I DON'T KNOW, SWEET TOOTH. IT'S A REAL NO MAN'S LAND THIS FAR NORTH. THIS IS WHERE THE PLAGUE ***STARTED.***

EVERYONE MOVED SOUTH REAL FAST. WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT COULD BE WAITING FOR US UP HERE.

YEAH, WELL, IT CAN'T REALLY BE MUCH WORSE THAN WHAT WE ALREADY SEEN.

I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY MORE BAD STUFF. I THINK THERE'S GONNA BE SOMETHING ***GOOD*** IN ALASKA. SOMETHING THAT WE ALL BEEN LOOKING FOR.

HEH... YOU'RE STILL AS NAÏVE AS THE DAY I FOUND YOU IN THE WOODS, AIN'T YA, KID?

WELL... I GUESS WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT WHICH OF US IS RIGHT.

...YER NOT SCARED, ARE YA, MR. JEPPERD?

SCARED? I DON'T GET SCARED, SWEET TOOTH, YOU KNOW THAT.

...YEAH. I KNOW.

But The Boy wasn't so sure. He could swear that he did see fear in The Big Man's face. And that really scared him.

But he tried to put it out of his mind. As they looked out on the sun coming up over the mountains, The Boy felt excited about what they might find in the town that he came from. He didn't know what, but something was waiting for him there . . . waiting to be discovered.

THE BALLAD OF JOHNNY AND ABBOT

"OKAY, LET ME MAKE THINGS EASY FOR YOU, JOHNNY..."

IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY. I KNOW YOU LIKE WHEN I KEEP IT SIMPLE...

YOU JUST HAVE TO TELL ME WHERE THEY WENT. WHERE THEY'RE HEADING...THAT'S ALL I WANT.

YOU HELP ME OUT...AND I WON'T KILL YOU. THIS IS YOUR *LAST CHANCE*, LITTLE BROTHER.

WH-WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? WHY CAN'T YOU JUST LEAVE THEM ALONE?

WHY? THERE IS NO "WHY" ANYMORE. IT'S JUST WHAT I HAVE TO DO. I *WILL* KILL JEPPERD. AND, I *WILL* RIP THE CURE OUT OF THOSE FREAKS.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU, DOUG?! WHAT HAPPENED TO MY *BROTHER*?!

THE SAME THING THAT HAPPENED TO ALL OF US, JOHNNY. THE PLAGUE HAPPENED.

AND IT STRIPPED EVERYTHING ELSE AWAY... SHOWED US ALL WHO *WE REALLY ARE.*

NO... THIS ISN'T YOU. I REMEMBER... I REMEMBER WHO YOU WERE...

YOU REMEMBER?! YOU REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YA LAST TIME?

I TOLD'JA IF THAT LITTLE BASTARD SHITS ON MY LAWN AGAIN, I'D PUT IT DOWN!

P-PLEASE, DADDY...HE DIDN'T MEAN IT.

-WHIMPER-

CLEAN IT UP.

LITTLE FUCKER!

YELP!

--ASSHOLE.

...WHAT DID YOU SAY TO ME?

N-NOTHING, SIR.

DON'T YOU LIE TO ME...AT LEAST BE MAN ENOUGH TO ADMIT IT!

DON'T!

LEAVE HIM ALONE.

PFFT! WHAT THE FUCK YOU GONNA DO ABOUT IT, EH, BIG MAN?

I'LL... I'LL KILL YOU...

YEAH, SURE YOU WILL. 'LEAST YOU GOT SOME BALLS, DOUGIE...NOT LIKE *THAT* LITTLE FAGGOT.

WHAP

THANKS, DOUGIE.

ARF! ARF!

...I WON'T ALWAYS BE HERE TO PROTECT YOU, YOU KNOW...

I KNOW...I'M SORRY.

I-I'M SORRY.

--DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE SORRY, JUST GET OUT OF THE FUCKING WAY!

TRYING TO WATCH THIS!

I KNOW, DAD, BUT IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO TAKE YOUR MEDS.

--BESIDES, I DON'T THINK IT'S HEALTHY FOR YOU TO WATCH THIS. JUST GOING TO GET YOU WORKED UP AGAIN.

RIOTS SWEEP PLAGUE-RIDDEN MIDWEST

TRICIA UNDERWOOD

AH, WHAT THE FUCK USE ARE THESE ANYWAY. DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING? IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD OUT THERE.

WE'RE ALL GONNA BE DEAD SOON ANYHOW! LISTEN. YOU NEED TO GET OUT THERE AND GET US SOME MORE FOOD AND STUFF BEFORE WE RUN OUT. AS MUCH AS YOU CAN CARRY.

COME ON, DAD. I THINK IT'S SAFER IF WE JUST STAY INSIDE AND--

NO! DON'T BE SUCH A FUCKING BABY! LISTEN TO ME, BOY! IT'S EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF NOW. YOU GOTTA GET OUT THERE WHILE YOU CAN!

YOU GOTTA BE A MAN, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE!

A--ALL RIGHT.

Quik Time
HOURS
AT LAST! ENCHIRITOS!
ICE!
SKRITCH!
SKRITCH!
CRASH
ARRGH!
H-HEY, BOY...

YOU'RE JUST HUNGRY TOO, HUH, LITTLE GUY?

PANT-PANT...

HERE YOU GO...

PICK UP ORDERS HERE

HEY, DON'T GO!

ARF!

WELL, ISN'T THAT SWEET...

GIVE US THAT FOOD. NOW.

COME ON, GUYS, I FOUND THIS STUFF FAIR AND SQU-

SHUT UP!

WHAP

OOF!

BLAM

SPLOOT

STAY DOWN, FUCKER! IT'S OURS NOW!

WHAT THE FU--

GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM HIM.

DOUG?! WHA-WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?

WE COULDN'T HOLD THE LINE AT THE CANADIAN BORDER. IT'S A FREE-FOR-ALL. NATIONAL GUARD AND THE ARMY ARE FALLING APART.

MAN, IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU. I DIDN'T KNOW IF YOU WERE--

MY UNIT AND I DECIDED TO HEAD BACK SOUTH. WORD IS A BUNCH OF US ARE MEETING UP NEAR NEBRASKA. GOING TO SET UP OUR OWN SAFE ZONE. I STOPPED TO GET YOU.

HOW BAD IS IT HERE? HOW MANY ARE SICK?

I'M NOT SURE. BAD. THE HOSPITALS GOT OVERRUN QUICK. MOSTLY WE'VE JUST BEEN STAYING INSIDE.

DAD'S STILL OKAY. I MEAN RELATIVELY. THE EMPHYSEMA IS REAL BAD, BUT--

LOOK, JOHNNY. I CAME BACK FOR *YOU*.

JESUS, DOUG. HE'S OUR FATHER, WE CAN'T JUST--

HE'S A SADISTIC OLD BASTARD. HE ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

LOOK, IT'S GOING TO BE HARD ENOUGH TO MAKE IT TO NEBRASKA AS IS--

I- I CAN'T LEAVE HIM.

I KNOW.

THAT'S WHY I *ALREADY* KILLED HIM.

--WHAT?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, DOUG?

I WENT TO THE HOUSE TO LOOK FOR YOU FIRST. HE WAS THERE ALONE.

I KNEW YOU'D NEVER LEAVE WITH HIM STILL THERE. SO I KILLED HIM.

NO!

JOHNNY! GET BACK HERE!

DAD?!

DAD? ARE YOU--

--OKAY...?

I'M SORRY, JOHNNY. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY.

HE-HE WAS OUR FATHER!

WHAT--WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU, DOUG?!

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?! YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'VE SEEN OUT THERE!

IT'S AN ABATTOIR! EVERYONE IS DEAD. EXCEPT *THEY'RE NOT EVEN PEOPLE ANYMORE.* THEY'RE *JUST MEAT.* DISEASED, ROTTED MEAT.

AND THAT'S ALL *HE* WAS TOO. ROTTEN MEAT. EXCEPT YOU COULDN'T LET GO.

EVEN AFTER EVERYTHING HE DID TO US...YOU WERE STILL SHACKLED TO HIM. I DID IT FOR YOU. YOU'RE *FREE* NOW.

I CAME BACK FOR *YOU*, JOHNNY. BUT I CAN'T PROTECT YOU FOREVER.

YOU GOTTA MAKE A CHOICE. IF YOU'RE GONNA COME WITH ME, YOU GOTTA LET GO. IT'S THE ONLY WAY YOU'RE GOING TO SURVIVE OUT THERE NOW.

WHATTA WE GOT HERE?

NEW RECRUITS, SIR. FROM UP NORTH.

CAPTAIN DOUGLAS ABBOT, SIR. 49th INFANTRY.

AT EASE, CAPTAIN. WE DON'T USE RANK HERE.

YES, SIR. WE... WE CAME TO HELP, SIR. ANYTHING WE CAN DO.

UH-HUH... AND WHAT IS IT EXACTLY YOU THINK YOU CAN "HELP" WITH, ABBOT?

THE WORLD'S FUCKED. OR DIDN'T YOU NOTICE.

AND WHAT THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH A SORRY SACK OF SHIT LIKE YOU?

I-UM...

HE'S WITH ME, SIR.

I DON'T CARE WHO HE'S WITH. HE'S USELESS TO ME.

YOU ARE HERE TO PROTECT OUR GATES. THE GATES PROTECT THE HYBRIDS. THAT'S ALL I CARE ABOUT.

DID-DID YOU SAY HYBRIDS? YOU MEAN THEY'RE *REAL?*

THAT'S RIGHT. WE GOT A FEW AND WE'RE GONNA CUT THE LITTLE FUCKERS APART UNTIL WE FIND THE CURE FOR THE FUCKING SICK. THAT'S ALL I CARE ABOUT. THE REST'A THE WORLD CAN TEAR THEMSELVES APART FOR ALL I CARE.

THE REST OF YOU CAN STAY, BUT HE GOES. I GOT ENOUGH MOUTHS TO FEED AS IS. DON'T NEED ANY FREELOADERS.

THAT IS UNACCEPTABLE.

WHAT DID YOU SAY TO ME?

THAT'S MY LITTLE BROTHER. HE STAYS.

LOOKIT. EITHER YOU STAY AND HE GOES, OR YOU *BOTH* GO. YOUR CHOICE.

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE, SOLDIER-BOY, BUT I'M IN CHARGE HERE!

I DON'T THINK SO.

!

LOOKS LIKE I'M IN CHARGE NOW.

ANY-ONE GOT A PROBLEM WITH THAT?

GOOD.

CLOSE THE GATES.

NO! NO WAY! STAY BACK!

JOHNNY, GET OUT OF THE WAY, MAN... OR I'M GOING TO SERIOUSLY FUCK YOU UP!

REALLY, THIS *IS* GETTING TEDIOUS, JOHNNY. THEY ARE *NOT* YOUR PETS.

I WON'T LET YOU HURT ANY MORE OF THEM.

I'M TIRED OF YOUR BULLSHIT, YOU LITTLE--

THAT'S ENOUGH, MONTCLARE.

COME ON, ABBOT. THIS IS WEAK!

CHRIST! JUST--JUST GIVE US A MINUTE, WILL YOU?

FINE, BUT WE REALLY NEED TO GET WORKING!

YES. I KNOW, SINGH. JUST A MINUTE. *PLEASE.*

FINE. BUT HURRY UP. I STILL HAVE TO RUN TESTS ON THE JEPPERD WOMAN TONIGHT.

--BULLSHIT, MAN!

=SIGH=

LISTEN JOHNNY, THE MEN ARE STARTING TO TALK.

TALK? WHAT DO I CARE IF THOSE MEATHEADS TALK?!

THAT'S JUST IT. YOU DON'T CARE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO CARE BECAUSE YOU KNOW I'LL ALWAYS PROTECT YOU.

BUT I CAN'T DO IT FOREVER.

AND WE HAVE WORK TO DO HERE, ***GREAT WORK.*** AND I HAVE A REPUTATION TO UPHOLD. I CAN'T LOOK WEAK IN FRONT OF THE MEN.

THEY'RE ALL TERRIFIED OF YOU. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THEM.

DOUGIE, COME ON...

NO. YOU DON'T GET IT, JOHNNY. ***YOU*** MAKE ME WEAK.

NO. THIS IS THE LAST TIME, JOHNNY. I CAN'T PROTECT YOU ANYMORE.

AND I JUST KEPT DOING IT. NO MATTER HOW OFTEN YOU FUCKED UP, I KEPT YOU SAFE.

AND HOW DID YOU REPAY ME?

YOU BETRAYED ME. THE FIRST TIME YOU LET JEPPERD GO... I FORGAVE YOU.

THEN YOU DID IT AGAIN.

I'M SORRY. I COULDN'T LET YOU HURT THOSE KIDS ANY-MORE...

IT DOESN'T MATTER. I'M GOING TO WIPE EVERY LAST ONE OF THOSE LITTLE ABOMINATIONS OFF THE FACE OF THE PLANET. YOU FAILED.

NOW... LAST CHANCE... TELL ME WHERE THEY WENT AND I'LL LET YOU STAY HERE. LEAVE YOU ALONE FOR GOOD.

I CAN'T, DOUGIE... I'M SORRY.

BUT I KNOW YOU WON'T KILL ME. YOU TALK TOUGH, BUT I KNOW YOU WON'T DO IT!

BLAM

NO MORE.

TAKE THE BODY OUTSIDE...

FIND SOMEWHERE NICE TO BURY HIM.

Y--YES, SIR.

LET'S GO, BOYS.

GRRR!

ARF!

ARF!

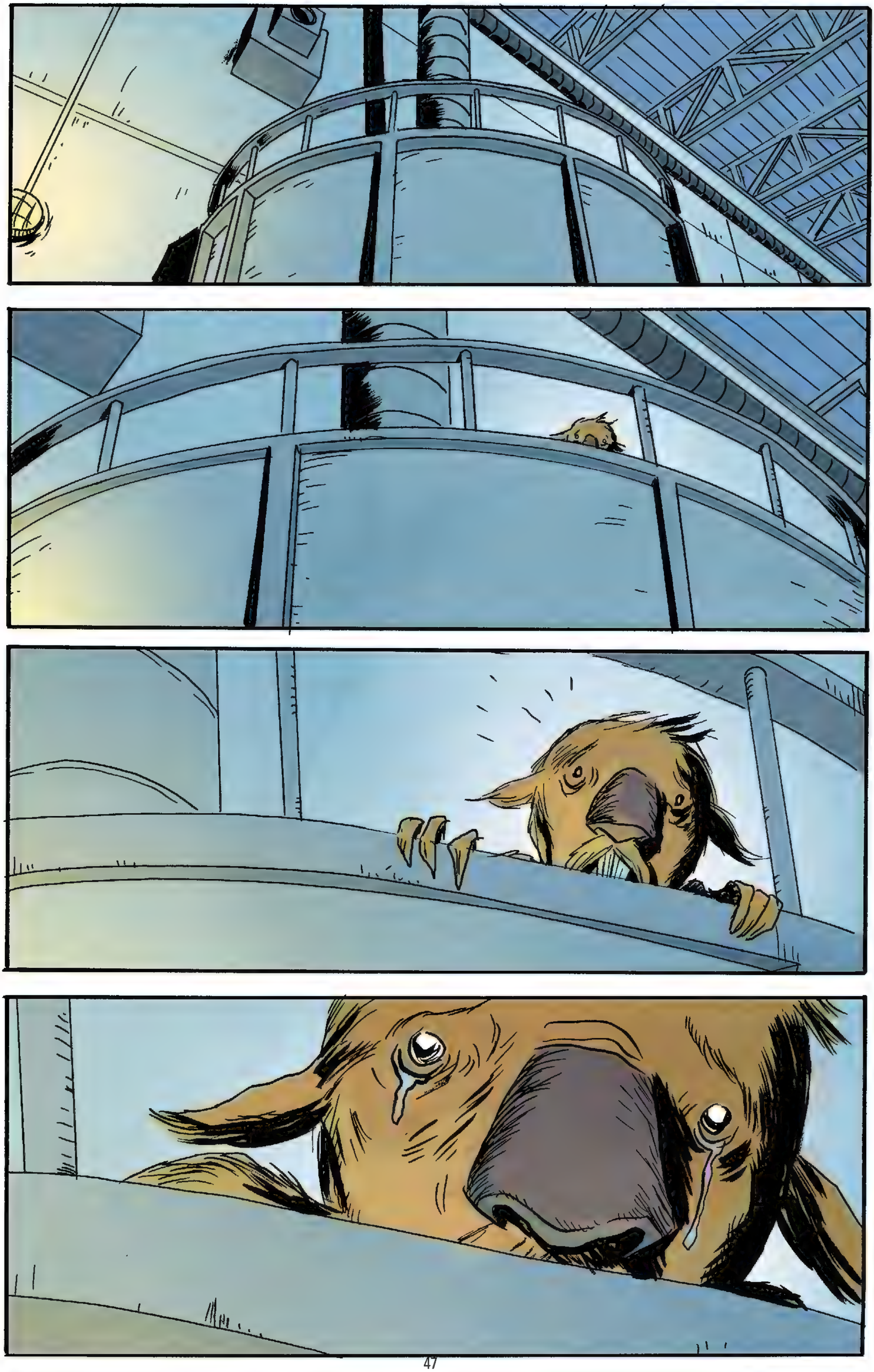
..SNIFF..SNIFF!

SWAP!

I SAID, COME ON!

YOU'VE GOT SOME HUNTING TO DO.

..SNIFF!



Jeff Kerr 2012

5:17 AM

THE SINGH TAPES:

VOL. 3 : ALASKA

Anchor Bay, Alaska.

This is where it began. And this is where it will end.

ORIZED SONEL NLY

UNITED STATES ARMY

I find myself so excited by the possibilities of what I'll find here that I can barely focus on the task at hand.

FORT SMITH ANCHOR BAY ALASKA

SECURITY CLEARANCE

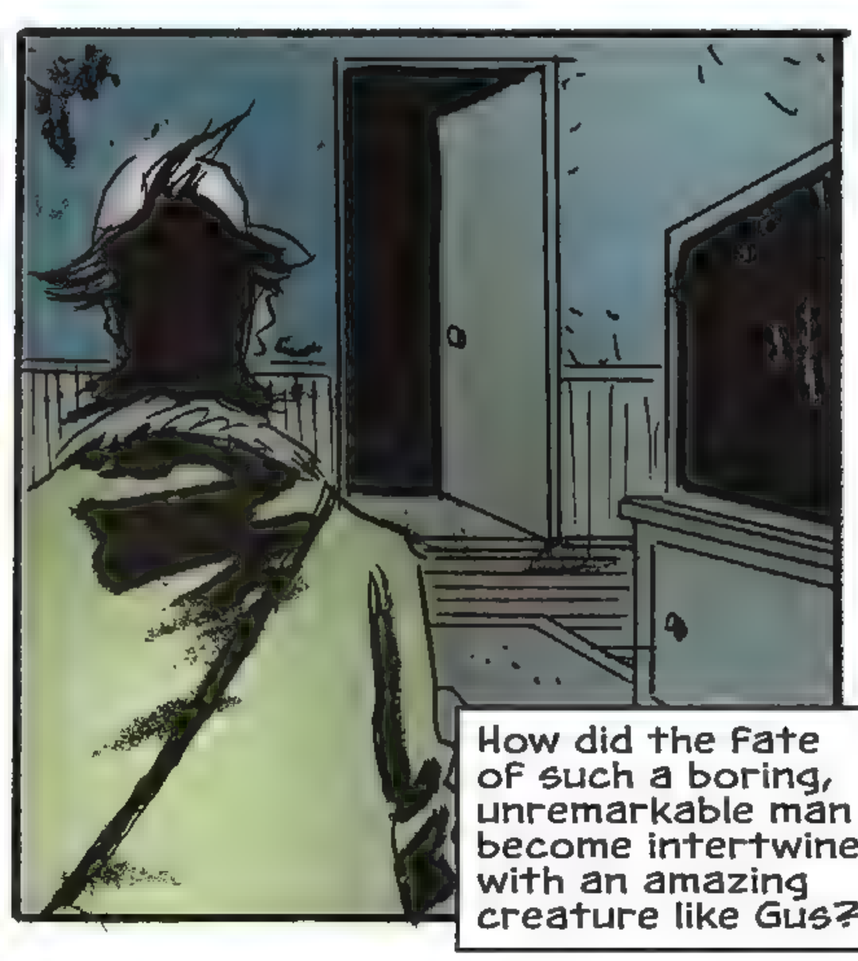
But I must, and I know just where to begin...with "his parents." Richard Fox, the man who raised him in the woods.

And his mysterious "Mother." A woman I suspect Gus never actually met. Who was she?

I was able to cull three items from the cabin in Nebraska. Three items that I hope will help to unlock the secrets of the hybrids and the plague.

I was easily able to find *Fox's* apartment in the local phone book.

By all accounts a very *average man.* And his apartment does nothing to convince me otherwise.



How did the fate of such a boring, unremarkable man become intertwined with an amazing creature like Gus?

5:17 AM

UNITED STATES ARMY

The I.D. tag I found for Fox said he was merely a janitor at Fort Smith. I thought maybe that was a cover, but seeing this place makes me think it was probably true.

The body is definitely a woman. Gus' "Mother," perhaps?

If so, then she never made it to the cabin with Gus after all. The first of Fox's lies to the boy exposed.

Fort Smith must be close by For the townsFolk to be employed there.

Other than the highway, there is only one other rough service road out of town; it must lead to the base.

I admit, my Findings at Fox's home were extremely underwhelming.

Fox's Bible...*my* Bible, reveals a man of incredible knowledge and passion. A prophet.

I try to reconcile that with the image of a lowly janitor. It just doesn't fit. How was he blessed with such vision?

Any questions I have about Fox will have to be answered here.

I'm not surprised to find it abandoned. Yet I can't shake the feeling that I'm being watched.

Nobody has been here for a long time.
No *man*, at least.
...Feels like I'm disturbing a sarcophagus.

RESTRICTED AREA
AUTHORIZED PERSONEL ONLY

That corpse...it's a doctor, a scientist like me.

What's he holding? It's old, whatever it is. *Another bible?*

5:17 AM

THE JOURNAL OF DR. JAMES. THACKER 1911

No. Not a bible... *something else...*

I'll have time to read it...but I can't stop now. I'm too close. I can feel something pulling at my gut like a magnet. Is it fear? Anticipation?

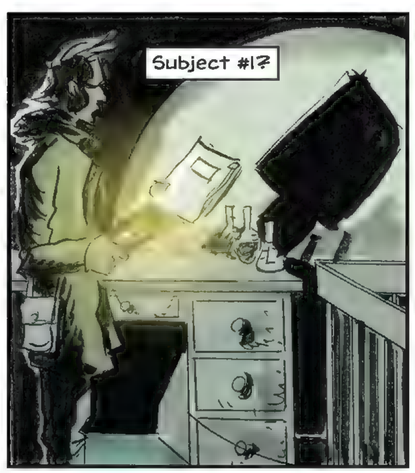
Or just the thrill of discovery?

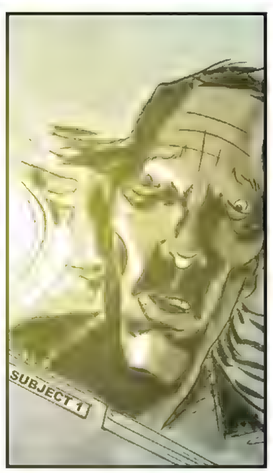
My God!

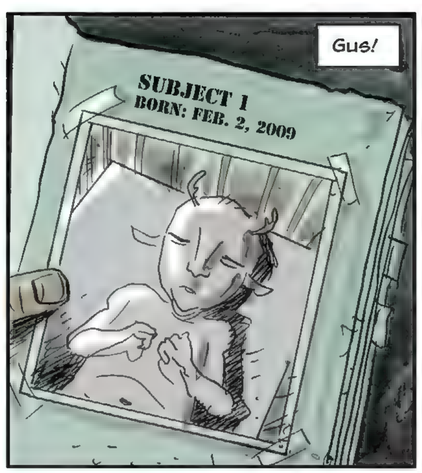
SUBJECT # 1

Subject #1
Born Feb. 2. 2009
Subject was
successfully rem
incubation tank
on February 2.
11:34 pm by Dr

What were these men doing here?!


Subject #1?


SUBJECT 1


Gus!
SUBJECT 1
BORN: FEB. 2, 2009

I came seeking answers, but I only have more questions.

Unless...

What I find isn't answers but an unbelievable story. It--it has to be a story, doesn't it?

But the more I read about this strange man, ***Thacker,*** and his ordeal...the more I realize the events line up perfectly with the mythology created by Fox in the later pages of his journal.

Thacker's brother-in-law, Simpson, came here in 1910. He integrated himself with the native community until he apparently made an amazing discovery below the ice and everything changed.

Another child was born... long ago. A child like Gus. And soon after, death and disease followed until the child was killed...buried.

Thacker didn't survive, but evidently his journal did.

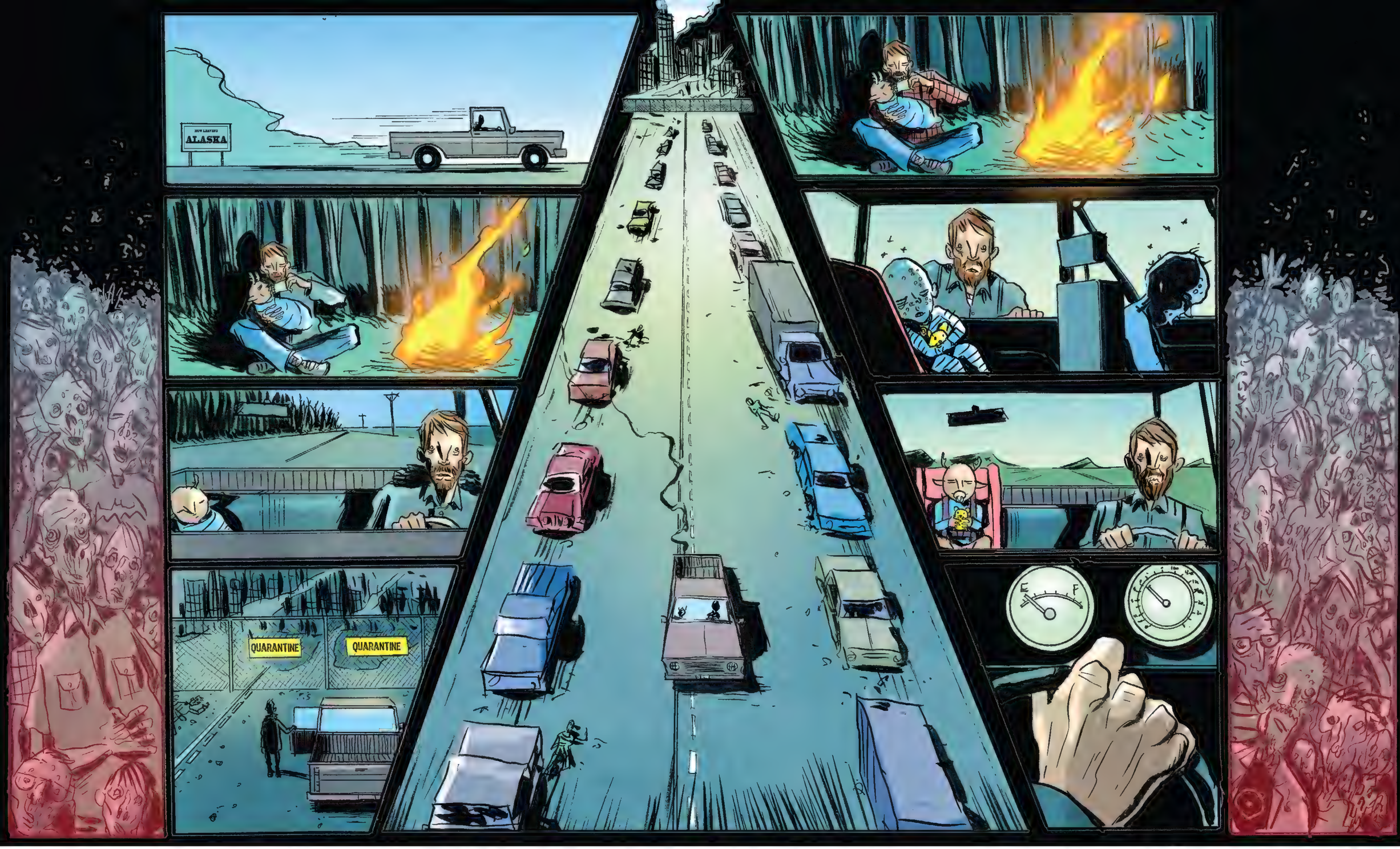
THE JOURNAL OF DR. JAMES THACKER 1911

THUNK

THE JOURNAL OF ST JAMES THALE K 1933

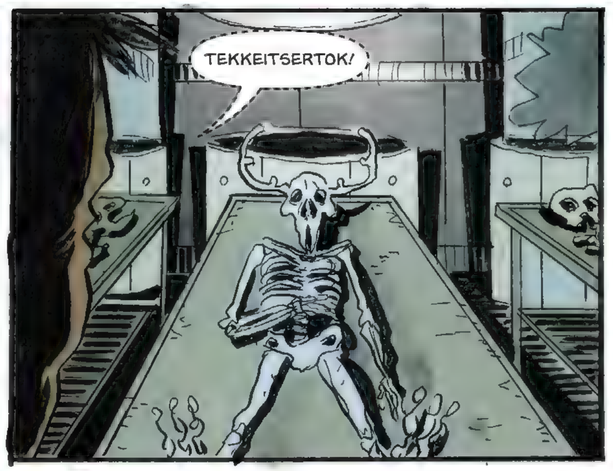
What the hell--?!

Looks like it's been excavated? I can hear the hum of generators still working down there too.


NOW LEAVING
ALASKA
QUARANTINE
QUARANTINE

My God!
I am here. I am at the source.

Some kind of laboratory built down there...looks like a bunch of incubation tanks or something?


TEKKEITSERTOK!

NEBRASKA STATE
WILDERNESS
SANCTUARY

END

Seven tanks, but Gus's was the only one that was "opened"; the others seem to have been broken...From *the inside*.

CLANK!

H-HELLO?

2012

MY DADDY TOLD ME TO NEVER, *EVER* LEAVE THE WOODS.

HE SAID THE WORLD OUTSIDE WAS NOTHIN' BUT SINNERS AND DEMONS AND BAD PEOPLE DOIN' BAD THINGS TO ONE ANOTHER.

THEN MR. JEPPERD CAME. AND HE WAS TOUGH AND STRONG AND I TRUSTED HIM, AND I FINALLY LEFT THE DEEP WOODS.

BUT THEN *THE SICK* GOT HIM AND I WAS ALL ALONE.

FOR A WHILE I THOUGHT MY DADDY WAS WRONG. I THOUGHT THERE WAS STILL GOOD IN THE WORLD.

BUT NOW I SEE THERE AIN'T. I SEE THAT HE WAS RIGHT. IT'S ONLY SADNESS AND DEATH OUTSIDE, AND NOW I'M STUCK IN IT TOO.

BUT THEN MR. JEPPERD CAME...

...SO WHAT EXACTLY DID YER DADDY TELL YOU HAPPENED? YOU KNOW...OUT HERE, TO THE WORLD?

SAID GOD CAME AND TOOK MOST PEOPLE UP TO HEAVEN ONE DAY.

THE REST OF US GOTTA PRAY REAL HARD SO WE CAN GO TOO.

MR. JEPPERD? CAN'T YOU SEE ME?

HUMPH! THAT'S WHAT I CALL SUGAR-COATIN' IT.

?

DARKER DOWN HERE.

YEAH...

SMELLS FUNNY TOO... DIFFERENT THAN BACK THERE.

AAAARRGH!

HOLD ON... I'M COMING!

LUCE?

LUCY?

LUCY?!

...KEEP THEM SAFE...

NO!

GODDAMMIT LUCY--!

KRIKT!

KRIKT!

M-MR. JEPPERD?

WAKE UP, MR. JEPPERD, WAKE UP!

WAKE UP!!! I DON'T WANNA BE ALONE AGAIN!!

WAKE UP!

WAKE UP, GUS!

WILD GAME

PART 1 of 4

MR. JOHNNY AM REAL DEAD.

MR. JOHNNY AM REAL DEAD AND BOBBY AM REAL SCARED!

BOBBY NOT STOP!

ARF!

BOBBY AM RUN FAST BIG TIME AND KEEP RUNNIN'...

ARF! ARF!

...THE BAD THINGS AM COMING.

AND THE BAD THINGS AM REAL HUNGRY!

ARF!

ARF!

GRRRAAARR!!!

THE BAD THINGS AM FAST, BUT BOBBY AM GOOD CLIMBER.

GRRRR...

ARF!

ARF!

BOBBY AM KEEP HIGHER. BOBBY AM SAFE.

WELL, WELL... WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE? OUR LITTLE RUNAWAY, EH?

GET IT DOWN FROM THERE.

YESSIR.

COME 'ERE YOU LITTLE SHIT!

WHUP

WHERE WERE YOU RUNNING TO, FREAK?

BOBBY AM GOOD TRACKER... BOBBY AM FIND GUSSY AND MR. JEPPERD! THEY AM BE REAL MAD!

UH-HUH... AND WHERE WERE THEY HEADING? TELL ME OR I FEED YOU TO MY DOGS.

GRRRKRRR

L-LASKA.

ALASKA. THAT'S WHERE SINGH THOUGHT THE BOY'S FATHER CAME FROM. GOOD.

ENJOY YOUR MEAL, BOYS.

GRRRRRRR

NO. WAIT.

ON SECOND THOUGHT, LOCK HIM UP WITH THE *OTHER ONE*. HE MIGHT MAKE *GOOD BAIT.*

KAW!

THIS IS IT? WHAT A FUCKING DUMP.

LANGUAGE.

SORRY.

AREN'T YOU SCARED HE WON'T COME BACK?

NAH! HE LIKES TO STRETCH HIS WINGS. BUT HE ALWAYS COMES BACK. DON'T WORRY, SWEETHEART.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW, MR. JEPPERD?

WELL, I GUESS WE FIND SOMEWHERE WARM TO CAMP. ONE OF THESE OLD HOUSES OR SHACKS SHOULD BE GOOD. MIGHT BE ABLE TO FIND ONE WITH A FIREPLACE.

...NO SIGN OF THE DOC OR HIS TRUCK.

NO. MAYBE HE DIDN'T MAKE IT THIS FAR.

EITHER WAY...WE SHOULD BE READY FOR *ANYTHING.*

JEPPERD. CHECK THIS OUT.

RABBIT?

TOO BIG FOR A RABBIT.

IT'S A FOX.

LET'S GO.

SWEET TOOTH, HOLD UP!

OPEN 24hr
DINER
OH!

...EASY, KID...

IT'S-IT'S OKAY.

SEE... THEY'RE FRIENDLY!

SNIFF SNIFF

BANG!

BANG!

THERE'S SOMEONE IN THERE!!

BECKY, KEEP THE KIDS BACK!

JIMMY?

I GOT YOUR BACK, BIG MAN.

KA-BACK!

SINGH?!

Y-YOU CAME? I KNEW YOU'D COME.

NOW IT CAN BEGIN...

WHAT? WHAT CAN BEGIN?

THE END.

P-PLEASE-- KEEP THE ***FERAL ONES*** AWAY FROM ME.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO YOU? HOW LONG YOU BEEN IN HERE LIKE THIS?

I-I FOUND THEM AT FORT SMITH...UNDER THE BASE...IN THE LAB.

AT FIRST I TRIED TO BEFRIEND THEM, BUT THEY'RE WILD. THEY CHASED ME. I BARELY MADE IT BACK HERE.

BUT I HAD ALREADY SEEN ENOUGH. I HAD SEEN THE TRUTH BURIED IN THE ICE.

...THE THINGS I FOUND. THE THINGS THEY WERE DOING. THEY FOUND THE TOMB YOU SEE? THEY OPENED THEM...THEY NEVER SHOULD HAVE OPENED THEM!

I THINK THE DOC'S BRAIN IS BROKEN.

HUSH CHILD! LISTEN....THE PLAGUE...THE HYBRIDS... GUS' FATHER WAS JUST BEGINNING TO GLEAN THE TRUTH BEFORE HE DIED...

BUT IT WASN'T ***GOD*** THAT DID THIS... THAT CREATED YOU... IT WAS ***GODS. PROJECT MOREAU.*** THEY CALLED IT PROJECT MOREAU. SO OBVIOUS, DON'T YOU THINK?

YOU BETTER START TALKING SENSE, OLD MAN!

I'M TALKING ABOUT ACTUAL, LIVING BEINGS JEPPERD! INCREDIBLE CREATURES THAT ONCE WALKED THE EARTH...

THEY WERE NOT JUST CREATURES OF MYTH. THEY WERE REAL! FLESH AND BLOOD LIKE YOU AND I. THEY WALKED THE EARTH JUST LIKE YOU AND I DO NOW.

THEN A CHILD WAS BORN. A GODLING. A DEER-BOY LIKE YOU! BUT HE BROUGHT THE SICKNESS WITH HIM. HE CAME TO PUNISH US FOR DISTURBING THEIR SLEEP!

BUT THEN THACKER FOLLOWED. AND THACKER DID WHAT ALL MEN DO. HE KILLED IT. HE BURIED IT DEEP BELOW THE ICE. AND THE DYING STOPPED. AND THEY WENT BACK TO SLEEP.

BUT THACKER DIDN'T STOP THE APOCALYPSE...HE JUST ***POSTPONED IT!*** THEY FOUND HIS JOURNAL IN THE ICE! THESE SCIENTISTS...THESE STUPID MEN, THEY FOUND HIS JOURNAL!

DON'T YOU ALL SEE WHAT WE'VE DONE!? DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND! ONCE THEY FOUND THE TOMBS AGAIN, THEY COULDN'T STOP THEMSELVES.

THEY BUILT A LABORATORY OVER IT! SUCH SACRILEGE. SUCH BLASPHEMY! IT'S NO WONDER THEY WANTED TO PUNISH US AGAIN. A LABORATORY! SCIENCE IS DEATH! I SEE THAT NOW! I WAS SO WRONG.

THEY TRIED TO CLONE THEM! THEY TRIES TO HARNESS THE POWER...TRIED WEAPONIZE GODHOOD. CAN YOU IMAGINE?! THE ARROGANCE OF THESE STUPID MEN.

THE PLAGUE. YOU HYBRIDS... YOUR FATHER WAS JUST BEGINNING TO GLEAN THE TRUTH BEFORE HE DIED...

IT WASN'T *GOD* THAT DID THIS... THAT CREATED YOU...IT WAS *GODS.*

INCREDIBLE BEINGS, CREATURES THAT ONCE WALKED THE EARTH...

THEY FOUND THEM, YOU SEE...THEIR REMAINS...AND CLONED THEM... *CLONED YOU.*

YOU, GUS... YOU ARE THE FIRST OF THIS *NEW RACE* OF GODS.

YOU HAVE COME TO JUDGE MANKIND. AND YOU BROUGHT THE SICKNESS WITH YOU.

IT WAS YOU!

THE PLAGUE WAS BORN WITH YOU!

THE JOURNAL OF DR. JAMES THACKER 1911

2012

IT WAS YOU, GUS... THE PLAGUE CAME *FROM YOU!*

THAT'S ENOUGH, SINGH!

WILD GAME

PART 2 of 4

TH-THAT AIN'T TRUE. I DIDN'T HURT NOBODY!

YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME?! GO SEE FOR YOURSELF! IT'S ALL THERE, UNDER THE BASE... THEIR TOMBS... THE LABS!

YOU WERE *THE CARRIER*, GUS! YOU WERE SENT TO *KILL ALL OF US!!*

THAT'S ENOUGH, OLD MAN!!

WHAP!

--UNGH!!

YOU'RE LUCKY I DON'T KILL YOU.

--WOULDN'T MATTER.

GUS?

WE'RE TOO LATE!! TOO LATE!!

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, GUS.

SHE'S RIGHT, KID. HE'S LOST IT.

NO. I WANT TO SEE IT. I WANT TO SEE WHERE I CAME FROM.

WE CAME THIS FAR. LET'S SEE THIS THROUGH.

I'LL TAKE SWEET TOOTH TO THE BASE. JIMMY, FIND US A WARM PLACE TO SLEEP.

BECKY, MAYBE YOU AND THE OTHERS CAN START SCAVENGING THESE BUILDINGS FOR FOOD AND SUPPLIES. WE'RE RUNNING LOW ANYWAY.

SOUNDS GOOD, BOSS.

UM... WHAT ABOUT THESE GUYS?

THEY SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN A LIKING TO YA, DARLIN'.

THEY THINK YER THEIR MOMMA!

HOW FAR OUT ARE WE?

AN HOUR, MAYBE LESS. BUT THE SUN'S GOING DOWN. SHOULD WE WAIT UNTIL DARK TO MOVE IN ON THEM?

HMM.

WHAT IS IT, SIR?

GIVE ME YOUR RIFLE.

BLAM!

JESUS CHRIST! IT'S A HYBRID!

KKUMP!

IT *WAS* A HYBRID... NOW IT'S A *MESSAGE.*

"FIND ANYTHING GOOD?"

WELCOME TO ALASKA

A FEW CANS OF FOOD, SOME MITTENS.

THEY REALLY DO LIKE YOU, DON'T THEY.

YES. THEY WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE. AND NONE OF THEM TALK. IT'S KIND OF CREEPY, THE WAY THEY JUST LURK AROUND LIKE THAT.

THEY'VE BEEN HERE ALL ALONE FOR A LONG TIME. MAYBE THEY'RE JUST LONELY?

GREAT. JUST WHAT I NEED, MORE PETS.

YOU OKAY?

I'M FINE. JUST WORRIED ABOUT GUS.

WHAT?

OH, COME ON...YOU GOT *IT* BAD FOR GUS!

YUCK! I DO NOT!

YEAH, ***SURE*** YOU DON'T.

IT'S OKAY, SWEETIE. I THINK IT'S CUTE.

HEY, DON'T BE SAD. GUS IS GOING TO BE OKAY.

IT'S NOT THAT... LUCY USED TO CALL ME "SWEETIE."

DO YOU STILL MISS HER?

YES. LOTS.

ME TOO.

"WHAT *IS* THIS PLACE?"

KID... I HAVE NO IDEA.

...DO YOU THINK DR. SINGH WAS TELLING THE TRUTH?

EVEN IF SINGH WASN'T BATSHIT CRAZY, I DOUBT EVEN HE COULD FIGURE OUT WHAT THE HELL THEY WERE REALLY DOING HERE.

NO, ABOUT THE PLAGUE. DO YOU THINK IT CAME *FROM ME?*

COME ON, KID...

GODS AND ALL THAT STUFF. YOU KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT THAT BULLSHIT.

DO YOU?

...

HONESTLY? YEAH... I THINK MAYBE IT DID.

I'M SORRY. I KNOW THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR, BUT I THINK IT PROBABLY DID SOMEHOW.

I MEAN YOU HYBRIDS AND THE PLAGUE ALL *STARTED* AT THE SAME TIME. EVERYBODY KNOWS IT HAS TO BE CONNECTED SOMEHOW.

LOOK. I KNOW YOU CAME HERE LOOKING FOR SOME GREAT SECRET. SOME BIG ANSWER TO EVERYTHING, BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S HERE.

BUT WHAT ABOUT WHAT MY DADDY TOLD ME?

...WHY DID HE LIE TO ME?

HE DIDN'T. I THINK YER DAD BELIEVED EVERYTHING HE EVER TOLD YOU ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL AND ALL THAT.

TRUTH IS WE AIN'T EVER GONNA UNDERSTAND HOW IT HAPPENED... WHAT THE HELL THEY WERE DOING HERE IN THIS LAB...NONE OF IT.

THERE IS NO BIG SECRET. AT LEAST NOT ONE YOU OR I OR SINGH OR YOUR DADDY ARE EVER GOING TO BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN.

BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER.

IT DON'T?

NO. NOT ANYMORE.

IT'S ***WHAT HAPPENS NEXT*** THAT REALLY MATTERS.

SKRITCH SKRITCH

WHAT'S THAT?

SHHHH.

SHHHH!

YOU THINK ONE OF THE NEW ANIMAL KIDS FOLLOWED US HERE?

YOU THINK IT'S WENDY?

WOULD YOU KEEP IT DOWN, KID?!

MAYBE SOMEONE ELSE STILL LIVES HERE!

SHHH!

WHAT IS IT?

JESUS!

GUS...

BOBBY AM SO TIRED.

BOBBY AM NEED HELP.

WHY?

WHY'D THEY HAVE TO DO *THIS?*

THERE IS NO WHY WITH ABBOT.

WHAT HAPPENED, BOBBY?

WHERE'S JOHNNY?

MR. JOHNNY HE AM DEAD.

THEY LET ME GO. TOLD ME TO RUN... TO FIND GUSSY.

BOBBY AM RUN SO FAR. BUT BOBBY AM SMELL YOU ALL THIS WAY... BUT NOW *HE* AM COMING TOO.

HOW MANY WILL THERE BE?

TOO MANY.

THIS AIN'T RIGHT. HE DIDN'T DESERVE THIS.

NONE OF US DESERVE ANYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED.

SINGH CAN BLABBER ON ALL HE WANTS ABOUT GODS AND FATE. BUT IF THERE EVER WAS A GOD, HE DIED A LONG TIME AGO. WHAT MATTERS NOW IS KEEPING THE REST OF THESE KIDS *SAFE.*

SO YOU TELL ME, FAT MAN...

YOU READY FOR ONE MORE FIGHT?

ONE MORE FIGHT?

HELL, WE DIDN'T GROW THESE PLAYOFF BEARDS FOR NOTHING, JEPPERD.

THERE IS ONLY ONE HIGHWAY INTO TOWN. SO WE KNOW WHERE THEY'RE COMING FROM.

148

ANCHOR BAY

FORT SMITH

LAKE LENOX

KINDT BAY

WELL, THIS ABBOT MOTHERFUCKER ISN'T HIDING THE FACT THAT HE'S COMING. HE ***WANTS*** US TO KNOW. SO SAFE BET IS THAT HE'S PLANNING ON ROLLING RIGHT IN HERE GUNS A-BLAZING.

RIGHT. THERE MAY BE ONLY ONE WAY IN, BUT THE SERVICE ROAD TO THE MILITARY BASE ACTUALLY SPLITS OFF AND HEADS BACK AROUND TO THE HIGHWAY.

NO! NO WAY WE'RE GOING ANYWHERE WITHOUT YOU.

SWEET TOOTH, LISTEN...

ONE ROAD IN, BUT TWO ROADS OUT. WHAT ARE YA THINKING, BOSS?

THE BASE IS THE SAFEST PLACE FOR THE KIDS TO BE. I SAY WE STASH THEM THERE WITH THE TRUCK.

THEN WE MAKE OUR STAND HERE. TRY TO TAKE OUT AS MANY OF THEM AS WE CAN. AND IF THEY GET PAST US, THE KIDS TAKE THE TRUCK AND HEAD BACK SOUTH.

NO. I CAN FIGHT TOO!

IF?

...ALL RIGHT, ***WHEN*** THEY MAKE IT PAST US.

BUT WE HAVE WEAPONS. AND I STILL HAVE SOME OF THE DYNAMITE WE TOOK FROM THE EVERGREENS.

WE'VE ***GOT*** TO BUY THE KIDS TIME. KEEP THEM BUSY WHILE THEY SLIP AWAY.

LOOK, KID...I KNOW THIS ISN'T EASY TO HEAR. BUT WE AIN'T GOT A CHOICE AND WE AIN'T GOT TIME TO ARGUE ABOUT IT.

ABBOT IS ALMOST HERE. AND HE'S NOT GOING TO STOP UNTIL WE ARE ALL DEAD.

ONE THING WE *DO* KNOW...ONE THING WE *CAN'T ARGUE ABOUT* IS THAT SOONER OR LATER THE PLAGUE GETS ALL OF US...ALL OF US *HUMANS* I MEAN.

BUT NOT YOU. YOU KIDS ARE SAFE FROM IT. AND I GOTTA KEEP IT THAT WAY. HELL. MAYBE THAT'S WHY I LASTED AS LONG AS I HAVE.

MAYBE THAT'S WHY I'M STILL HERE EVEN THOUGH LOUISE AND LUCY AND--AND MY SON--ARE GONE.

MAYBE *I'M SUPPOSED* TO KEEP YOU SAFE, THIS ONE LAST TIME.

BUT-- I DON'T WANNA GO ON WITHOUT *YOU.*

MR. JEPPERD?

WE MAY NOT HAVE A CHOICE, KID.

THOSE OTHER KIDS ARE GONNA NEED SOMEONE TO LOOK OUT FOR THEM. SOMEONE TO-- SOMEONE TO...

I--!

MR. JEPPERD?

I'M-I--

MR. JEPPERD, YOU OKAY?

BIG MAN?

I'M-I'M FINE.

YOU DON'T LOOK FINE.

I'M FINE! LET'S GET MOVING, WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME HERE!

BECKY. CAN YOU DRIVE?

YEAH. I THINK SO. WHY?

GOOD. PACK AS MUCH AS YOU CAN IN THE TRUCK. YOU'RE TAKING THE KIDS TO FORT SMITH. WHEN THE FIGHTING STARTS, YOU TAKE THE SERVICE ROAD AROUND TO THE HIGHWAY AND HIGHTAIL IT SOUTH. ***DO NOT STOP. DO NOT TURN BACK. NO MATTER WHAT.***

HEY! WHERE'D ALL THE OTHER HYBRID KIDS GO?

SNEAKY LITTLE BUGGERS MUST'VE TAKEN OFF.

HELL, MAYBE THEY CAN SENSE TROUBLE COMING OR SOMETHING. I'M SURE THEY'LL BE FINE. THEY LASTED THIS LONG ON THEIR OWN.

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

JEPPERD... I CAN'T. THIS IS NOT--

LOOK, BLONDIE. LUCY'S GONE. IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO STEP UP.

BECKY, IS THAT WALKIE ON?

YEAH. I THINK SO.

KZZT!

THIS IS IT.

THE KIDS NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE ALIVE, NO MATTER WHAT.

GOOD. THEN GET MOVING!

I THOUGHT I'D DIED A LONG TIME AGO...

THE PLAGUE CAME AND TOOK EVERYTHING I LOVED AWAY FROM ME. BUT I WAS GOOD AT FIGHTING--GOOD AT KILLING--SO I SURVIVED.

BUT SURVIVAL ISN'T LIFE. I WAS JUST A COLD THING THAT PRETENDED TO BE A MAN...

BUT THEN EVERYTHING CHANGED.

I'M NOT ALONE ANYMORE. I HAVE A REASON TO FIGHT. *A REASON TO KILL.*

THIS WORLD IS DEAD FOR *ME*. BUT MAYBE *THEY* CAN STILL MAKE SOMETHING OF IT.

SO I TRY TO PUSH HIM FROM MY MIND. BECAUSE I KNOW THAT HE WILL DO WHAT HE ALWAYS DOES. HE'LL MAKE ME WEAK... *VULNERABLE.*

BUT AS THE TRUCK PULLS AWAY, I FEEL LIKE A PIECE OF MYSELF IS STUCK TO ITS FENDER. LIKE MY GUTS ARE BEING RIPPED OUT AND DRAGGED ALONG THE OLD ROAD WITH IT.

I *WANT* TO TURN BACK. WANT TO TURN TO SEE HIM *ONE LAST TIME*. BUT I DON'T DARE. I DON'T DARE LOOK AT HIS FACE AGAIN.

IF I DO... I MIGHT NEVER LET HIM GO.

This is how the end begins...

The demon rides through ice. A convoy of death.

He will bear down on *the boy*, belly full of fire and hatred.

And there will be nowhere left to run. Nowhere left to hide.

Yet they will try to stop him. They will try to protect the boy from his cruel fate.

But it is pointless. Everything they have done. Every decision they have made has led them to this moment.

There will be pain and death. And from it new life will spring.

This rebirth was set in motion centuries ago...when men with names like Thacker and Simpson dared to disturb the sleeping place of the last gods.

And the Flame was renewed when in their arrogance, modern men--scientists like *I was*--tried to harness that power for themselves.

Their actions doomed us all. And no amount of preparation...no amount of fighting can stop the cull that has now almost reached its zenith.

Yet they try. They hide and sneak and plan...like men always do.

They hope and they pray that maybe they can somehow break free of these sad destinies.

ANCHOR BAY ALASKA 160 KM

But they can't. Evil is coming. And it will consume all innocence.

Only now is the truth starting to settle in their minds. Only now do they see it. The war has already been fought.

There is no respite. There is no more hope.

The demon comes. I can already feel his heat on my cheeks.

He will swallow them in his maw. He will bury them in hell.

And he'll bury me too. I thought I was a prophet. I thought I was *special*, but now I *see* the truth.

I'm just a sad old man alone in the dark babbling nonsense to the shadows.

There is no greater plan. No final revelation. There is only death now. And I'm alone. Alone and scared...

This is how the end begins.

This is the final war. The last gasp of mankind.

WILD GAME

PART 3 of 4

This is the death of us all.

THIS IS INCREDIBLE!

WH-WHAT IS IT? I DON'T UNDERSTAND?

IT AM SMELL FUNNY DOWN HERE.

THIS IS WHERE I CAME FROM. I WAS BORN IN ONE'A THOSE TANKS, I THINK.

I DIDN'T--I DIDN'T HAVE A REAL MOMMY OR DADDY LIKE I THOUGHT.

MY DADDY... THAT MAN-- HE TOOK ME FROM HERE.

BUT HE LOVED YOU. AND HE RAISED YOU AND TOOK CARE OF YOU.

THAT'S MORE THAN SOME OF US HAD.

SO THIS IS WHERE THE OTHER KIDS CAME FROM? THE ONES IN THE TOWN?

BUT--WHAT ABOUT ME AND ALL THE OTHER HYBRID KIDS WHO WERE BORN AFTER EVERYONE GOT SICK?

HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

DON'T KNOW. THE DOCTOR SAID IT WAS ME. THAT WHEN I WAS BORN I CARRIED THE SICK, AND WHATEVER IT WAS THAT MADE ALL THE OTHER HYBRIDS, IN ME.

I WAS-- I WAS THE CARRIER. I KILLED EVERYONE. I KILLED MY DADDY AND YOURS.

...AND MS. LUCY.

I KILLED EVERYONE.

I DON'T CARE WHAT DR. SINGH SAYS. YOU DIDN'T HURT NO ONE. YOU'RE GOOD.

IT WAS THE MEN THAT LIVED HERE. THE SCIENTISTS. WHATEVER THEY WERE DOING CAUSED ALL OF IT. IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT.

SHE'S RIGHT, GUS. YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG.

WE DID... ***HUMANS***, I MEAN. WHATEVER HAPPENED HERE... WHATEVER CAUSED YOU AND THE SICK...IT WAS US.

BUT WHAT IF MY DADDY AND DR. SINGH ARE RIGHT?

WHAT IF IT WASN'T THE SCIENTISTS? WHAT IF *GOD* DID SEND ME TO KILL EVERY-ONE?

I JUST CAN'T BELIEVE THAT, GUS. IT DOESN'T--

--KSSHHT --YOU THERE?

WE'RE HERE, JEPPERD. WHAT'S UP?

THEY'RE HERE.

...IT'S STARTING.

THEY'RE CLOSE, JIMMY. YOU READY?

I'M READY.

The beast draws near. The earth trembles under him.

VRROOOM!

VRROOOM.

I can hear his vile roar now. It splits the air. Satan's thunder.

NOW!

The end times are here.

CLK!

What follows next is Fire and death.

My prophecies are finished. My role in this is over. All I can do is hide and wait.

Death is here.

KA-THOOOM!

WE GOT TWO OF 'EM!

--KSHHT --OOD. MAKE A RUN FOR IT--

"...I'LL COVER YOU!"

ALL RIGHT, MOTHER-FUCKERS...

WHUMP!

...LET'S DANCE.

BLAM! BLAM!

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

THERE!

JIMMY, I'M ON THE MOVE. MEET ME AT THE RENDEZVOUS!

THEY'RE RIGHT ON ME!

HURRY!

IT'S HAPPENING, ISN'T IT!? JUST LIKE I SAID IT WOULD. IT'S HAPPENING!

SHUT THE FUCK UP, SINGH!

WH-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

GIVING THEM SOMETHING TO SHOOT AT. MAYBE ONE OF YOUR GODS CAN MAKE YOU BULLETPROOF.

NO!

THAT WAS COLD, MAN.

CHAK!

HE HAD IT COMING, TRUST ME.

HOW MANY DID WE GET?

NOT ENOUGH. MAYBE HALF. LET'S GET TO THE STEEPLE. IT'S BRICKED AND WE'LL HAVE HIGH GROUND!

I DIDN'T SEE ABBOT.

MAYBE HE WAS IN ONE'A THE TRUCKS THAT BLEW?

THAT WOULD BE TOO EASY...

YOU READY?

LET 'EM HAVE IT, JEP!

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

BLAM!

FALL BA--ACK!

BECKY?!
IT'S TIME TO GO! WE'RE PINNED DOWN HERE BUT WE HAVE THEM DISTRACTED. TAKE THE TRUCK AND GET THE KIDS AWAY FROM HERE!
GUSSY, ME AM SCARED!
TAKE THE SERVICE ROAD SOUTH. DO NOT TURN BACK!
OKAY! WE'RE GOING!
ME TOO, BOBBY. JUST STAY CLOSE. WE'RE GONNA BE OKAY!
MR. JEPPERD AND MR. JIMMY ARE GOING TO BE OKAY. YOU'LL SEE. NOTHING CAN HURT THEM.
WE'LL GO SOUTH AND BEFORE LONG THEY'LL MEET US!
OKAY, GUYS, HURRY UP, GET IN--
OH SHIT!
JEPPERD, SOMEONE'S COMING! A TRUCK IS COMING UP THE SERVICE ROAD!
WHAT?!
MOTHERFUCKER! THEY MUST HAVE SPLIT UP AND SENT ANOTHER TRUCK TO CUT OFF THE SERVICE ROAD. THEY'RE WAY AHEAD OF US!

JEPPERD, THEY'RE ALMOST HERE!

I--I CAN'T DO THIS, JEPPERD! PLEASE!

POK!

PING!

BLAM!

--JEPPERD?!

JEPPERD, ARE YOU THERE? WHAT THE FUCK DO WE DO?!

FUCK!

JEP...YOU GOTTA GET TO THEM KIDS!

THERE'S NO WAY. THERE'S TOO MANY OF THEM DOWN THERE!

I CAN KEEP THEM BUSY, BUY YOU SOME TIME TO SLIP OUT THE BACK. IF YOU CAN GET TO SINGH'S TRUCK...

THEY'LL CUT YOU DOWN!

WE BOTH KNEW WE WEREN'T GETTING OUT OF THIS ONE ALIVE, TOMMY.

AND THOSE KIDS NEED YOU. SO LET'S STOP ARGUING AND DO THIS, BEFORE I LOSE MY NERVE.

CHAK!

BECKY! GET THE KIDS BACK IN THE LAB! HIDE AS BEST YOU CAN.

I'M COMING...

KSHHT-- YOU HEAR ME?

I'M COMING FOR YOU!

ALL RIGHT, BIG MAN, GET GOING, I GOT A FIGHT TO PICK.

I CAN'T ASK YOU TO DO THIS FOR ME...

IT AIN'T FOR YOU, JEP... IT'S FOR *THEM.*

NOW GO!

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME...

THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE, IN EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

GIVE US THIS DAY, OUR DAILY BREAD AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE MAY FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION AND DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

...AMEN.

ALL RIGHT, LET'S GO, YOU STUPID MOTHERFUCKERS!

KA-BLAM!

SONSOFBITCHES!

BLAM!

AH, FUCK!

BLAM!

NOW YOU DONE GONE AND PISSED ME OFF, YOU MOTHERLESS DOGLICKERS.

FWIP!

THUNK!

BLAM!

--UNGH!

BLAM!

BLAM! BLAM!

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

SINGH?! WHAT THE FUCK?

I-- PLEASE, TAKE ME WITH YOU!

I HAVE THE KEYS! TAKE ME OR I'LL THROW THEM!

P-PLEASE, JEPPERD.

NOT QUITE READY TO BE A MARTYR JUST YET? I THOUGHT THIS WAS "YOUR FATE"?

I-- MAYBE I WAS A BIT HASTY--

JESUS CHRIST! SHUT UP AND GET IN, ASSHOLE.

BECKY? YOU THERE?

BECKY? GUS?

JUST HANG ON...

...I'M ON MY WAY.

CRUNCH— CRUNCH

--KSST! GUS?

BECKY?

HELLO, JEPPERD... YOU'RE TOO LATE.

I HAVE ALL YOUR LITTLE FRIENDS...WE'LL SEE YOU SOON.

2012

EVERYTHING ENDS.

WHATTA YOU SEE, SINGH? WHAT ARE WE HEADING INTO HERE?!

NO MATTER WHAT WE DO, NO MATTER HOW GOOD WE ARE, IN THE END WE ALL GOTTA DIE.

HARD TO FOCUS...

TRY, DAMN IT!

OH!

WHAT? *WHAT IS IT?!*

THERE AIN'T NO ONE THAT CAN SAVE US. AINT NO ONE THAT CAN PROTECT US.

ABBOT, HE--HE HAS GUS.

EVERYTHING ENDS.

AND EVERYONE WE LOVE HAS GOTTA DIE TOO. JUST LIKE MS. LUCY AND JOHNNY DID...JUST LIKE MY DADDY DID.

I THINK HE THOUGHT THAT IF HE COULD KEEP ME HIDDEN AWAY IN THE DEEP WOODS, MAYBE I'D BE SAFE. MAYBE I'D LIVE FOREVER. BUT I KNOW NOW THAT THAT AIN'T TRUE.

I'LL DIE TOO. IT'S JUST THE WAY THINGS ARE.

THAT USED TO MAKE ME REAL SAD AND REAL SCARED.

EVERYTHING ENDS...

WILD GAME

PART 4 of 4

LET HIM GO, ABBOT! THIS IS ABOUT *YOU* AND *ME* AND YOU KNOW IT.

WELL, HERE I AM.

YOU'RE WRONG, JEPPERD. THIS *IS* ABOUT THEM. THIS IS ABOUT FINDING A CURE EVEN IF I HAVE TO RIP IT OUT OF THEM. AND MY WORK ISN'T DONE YET.

TH-THERE IS *NO CURE*, ABBOT. WHERE THEY CAME FROM... *THE LAB*, IT'S RIGHT INSIDE. GO AND SEE FOR YOURSELF. THERE ARE NO ANSWERS. AT LEAST NOT THE ONES YOU WANT.

DON'T YOU SEE WHAT THESE CHILDREN REALLY ARE?! THEY ARE NOT ABOMINATIONS... THEY'RE GODS!

THEY ARE *LIFE ITSELF*, BUT THEY CAN'T THRIVE UNTIL *WE* ARE GONE.

WE WERE *SO* WRONG. THE THINGS WE DID--THE THINGS *I* DID...

BUT IT'S NOT TOO LATE. WE CAN MAKE IT RIGHT. WE CAN LET THEM LIVE.

SHUT THE FUCK UP, YOU USELESS OLD BASTARD!

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY MORE OF YOUR BULLSHIT.

THEY'RE DISEASE-RIDDLED LITTLE ATROCITIES! AND THIS ONE... THIS ONE IS THE WORST OF ALL.

MAYBE THE *ONLY CURE* IS TO KILL THEM ALL... STARTING WITH HIM.

CHK!

GET THAT GODDAMN GUN AWAY FROM HIM! NOW!

I SWEAR TO GOD I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU!

AH...THERE'S THE JEPPERD I KNOW AND LOVE. I THOUGHT YOU'D GONE SOFT ON ME.

WELL, I'LL MAKE YOU A LITTLE DEAL, JEPPERD.

A TRADE. YOU CAN TURN YOURSELF OVER AND I'LL LET ONE OF THESE THINGS GO.

EITHER YOUR BELOVED GUS...

...OR YOUR LONG LOST *SON?*

N-NO...

SURPRISE. I MANAGED TO KEEP HIM ALIVE AFTER YOUR ESCAPE FROM THE MILITIA CAMP. I'VE BEEN TAKING REALLY GOOD CARE OF HIM, TOO. JUST WAITING FOR AN OPPORTUNITY LIKE THIS TO REUNITE HIM WITH HIS DEAR OLD DAD...

OF COURSE, I DID HAVE TO EXPLAIN THAT HIS FATHER LEFT HIM BEHIND. THAT HE LOVED ANOTHER MORE THAN HIM. THAT HE ABANDONED HIM, JUST LIKE HE ABANDONED HIS MOMMY BEFORE I CUT HIM OUT OF HER.

SO...WHO WILL IT BE, JEPPERD?

WHO DO YOU LOVE MORE?

THUMP!

SKRITCH--- SKRITCH!

UH... BOSS?

WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?

ARRGH!

ROOAAARRR!!!

GUS!

GAAHHH!

GET AWAY FROM THOSE DOGS!

GET OFF!

GUS, RUN!

GRRRRRRRRR!

NO!

GODDAMMIT!

BLAM!

ABBOT!!

NO!

GRRRAAARRR!

ARF! ARF!

FUCK!

GET OFF!!

SNAP!

GRRARRR!

MR. JEPPERD!

ARRRGH!!

WHUMP!

GRRR...

SCHLUNK!

GAAAHH!!

SNAP!

I--IT'S OKAY...I'VE GOT YOU.

GRRRRR

--pant- pant--

--COME ON THEN, YOU BASTARD...

GRRARRR!

JEPPERD!!

BLAM!!

JEPPERD!

JEPPERD?
JUST HOLD ON... I'M ALL RIGHT.
AH, SHIT...
YOU'RE HURT *REAL BAD!*
UNGH-- I'LL BE OKAY. GOTTA GO AFTER BUDDY.
JEPPERD, THAT LOOKS BAD, MAN.
YOU'RE IN NO SHAPE TO GO ANY-WHERE!
YEAH, YOU GOTTA REST, LET THE DOCTOR FIX YOU!
KID, THAT'S MY SON HE HAS IN THERE. I LEFT HIM ONCE, I CAN'T LEAVE HIM AGAIN.
NO! I WON'T LET YOU GO!
SWEET TOOTH--GUS... LISTEN...
I'M GOING IN TO GET HIM. BUT IF I DON'T COME BACK SOON, YOU ALL HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. DRIVE AS FAR AWAY AS YOU CAN. FIND A SAFE PLACE.
NO! I WON'T GO WITHOUT YOU!
GUS, PLEASE. I HAVE TO DO THIS. BUT I ALSO HAVE TO KNOW THAT IF I FAIL, YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY.
YOU HAVE TO PROMISE ME ON YOUR HEART THAT YOU'LL GO!
I...I PROMISE.
GOOD BOY.
NOW GO! GET AS FAR AWAY FROM HERE AS YOU CAN!

SHIT!

ARRGHH!

SNAP!

JEPPERD!

NO MORE GAMES, JEPPERD...YOU TELL ME, *WHAT IS THIS PLACE?*

=NNNGG= FUCK... YOU...

WHAT IS THIS FUCKING PLACE?!

WHAP

AH-AH... DON'T YOU BLACK OUT ON ME YET. DO YOU HEAR ME, YOU FUCKING APE?!

WHAT DID SINGH FIND? WHERE DID *THE BOY* COME FROM?! *THE PLAGUE?*

FUCK... YOU...

TELL ME!!

CRACK!

ARRRGH!!!

HAD ENOUGH?

F--FUCK...

YOU!

--UNGH--
STILL GOT SOME FIGHT IN YOU, EH? GOOD...

FUCK ME?!

NO, JEPPERD, FUCK YOU!

DA!

UNGH... BUDDY... RUN!

RUN? DO YOU REALLY THINK THE LITTLE IDIOT UNDERSTANDS YOU? YOU'RE JUST LIKE THEM...A DUMB ANIMAL.

THIS IS THE *END*, JEPPERD. IT'S ABOUT TIME SOMEONE PUT YOU DOWN!

LOOK AT YOU. WHY WON'T YOU JUST DIE, GODDAMMIT?

...FUCK YOU, ABBOT.

JESUS.

WHAT IS IT, JEPPERD? WHY DO YOU JUST KEEP COMING, LIKE SOME GODDAMN COCKROACH?

EH? WHY WON'T YOU JUST DIE? WHY WON'T YOU JUST GIVE UP?!

BECAUSE...

...I LOVE THEM.

...

PATHETIC.

CLICK!

KKT--?

--gurrggle--

HOLD ON, MR. JEPPERD-- I'LL GO GET DOCTOR SINGH!

NO...NO, STAY, SWEET TOOTH.

JUST STAY.

IT'S GONNA BE OKAY. I PROMISE.

NO, KID... I'M SO TIRED. JUST WANNA REST. YOU'RE SAFE NOW.

NO! YOU'RE GONNA BE OKAY! NOTHING CAN HURT YOU!

LISTEN, KID--

NO!

PLEASE, GUS...LISTEN TO ME...

PROMISE ME--

PROMISE ME YOU'LL TAKE CARE OF MY BOY...

I...I WILL. I PROMISE.

YOU'RE A GOOD BOY, GUS.

A GOOD BOY...

MR. JEPPERD?

MR. JEPPERD?!

Jeff Zornow 2012

THIS IS A STORY...

THIS IS A STORY OF A LITTLE BOY WITH ANTLERS WHO LIVED ALONE IN THE WOODS.

THIS IS A STORY OF THE *BAD MEN* WHO FEARED HIM AND HUNTED HIM.

AND FOR A WHILE THE LITTLE BOY WITH ANTLERS THOUGHT THAT HE WOULD BE CAPTURED. HE THOUGHT THAT HE WAS ALL ALONE IN A WORLD OF DEATH AND EVIL.

AND HE THOUGHT THAT THIS EVIL--THESE BAD MEN--WOULD CONSUME HIM.

GET UP!

BUT THE BOY WAS *NOT* ALONE...

SWEET TOOTH

HOME SWEET HOME

I-I'M SCARED, TOMMY.

RUN!

NOW THERE WERE *TWO*. AND THIS STORY IS JUST *BEGINNING*...

THIS WAY!

WENT IN HERE.

MIGHT BE A TRAP. THEY'S SNEAKY LITTLE FUCKERS.

JUST A COUPLE OF KIDS. AIN'T NO TRAP.

SHIT, MAN... I DON'T LIKE THIS. WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO *THE ZOO* FOR THIS.

ZOO'S AT LEAST A DAY NORTH. SO, STOP YER PISSING AND MOANING AND KEEP YOUR HEAD UP.

SHIT, DON'T HAVE TO GET MAD. JUST SAYIN' IS ALL.

MAYBE IF YOU'D STOP TALKING SO GODDAMN MUCH THE OTHERS'D LET US STAY IN THE CAMP INSTEAD OF SENDING US OUT ON ALL THESE GODDAMN HYBRID HUNTS--

AHH!

THUNK!

JESUS!

THAT LITTLE MOTHERFUCKER!

GONNA SKIN THAT LITTLE BASTARD!

GETTIN' TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT!

THERE!

WE SEE YOU, YOU LITTLE FREAKS! NO SENSE HIDING. COME ON OUT AND WE'LL MAKE IT QUICK.

T-TOMMY!

TEACH YOU TO FUCK WITH ME!

LET HIM GO!

SHUT UP, YOU DISGUSTING LITTLE SHIT!

I'LL KILL YOU!

PFFT. FEISTY LITTLE ONE, AIN'T YA?

--UCK!

OH GOD!

GOD?

THE GODS STOPPED LISTENING TO *YOUR KIND* A LONG TIME AGO.

DAD!

Joe Lee 2012.

S-STEP BACK, MAN--I'LL KILL THE KID, I SWEAR!

D-DADDY?

DON'T BE SCARED, RICHARD. THIS MAN WON'T HURT YOU.

BACK THE FUCK OFF! I'LL DO THE KID RIGHT NOW!

NO... YOU WON'T.

THUNK!

DON'T WORRY, RICHIE.

I AM SAVED YOU.

UNCLE BOBBY!

I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU BOYS NOT TO LEAVE THE CAMP!

I'M SORRY, DAD. IT WAS MY FAULT, JUST WANTED TO HAVE A LOOK AROUND.

TOMMY, YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT. THERE ARE STILL TOO MANY MEN IN THESE OLD WOODS. IT'S DANGEROUS.

I NEED YOU TO BE SMARTER THAN THAT. TO LOOK OUT FOR YOUR BROTHER.

I KNOW. I'M SORRY, DAD.

FINE. LET'S GET BACK TO CAMP. IT'LL BE DARK SOON AND WE HAVE A LONG DAY AHEAD OF US TOMORROW.

GOOD. BOBBY AM REAL HUNGRY.

ME TOO!

WHAT AM WE DO WITH THEM, GUS?

LEAVE THEM...AS A *WARNING.*

STARVIN'!

SMACK!

NOT YET!

PRAYERS FIRST.

YOUR BROTHER'S RIGHT, RICHARD. WE NEED TO GIVE OUR OFFERING...

THE GODS HAVE GIVEN US THIS RABBIT... THIS ANIMAL THAT IS *ONE OF US*... TO SUSTAIN US. AND FOR THAT WE ARE GRATEFUL. AND WE MUST *NEVER FORGET*...

THE GODS ONCE LIVED IN HARMONY WITH MAN. BUT MAN FORGOT THEIR FACES AND TURNED TO SIN AND DEATH. AND AS THEIR WORLD CRUMBLED AROUND THEM THEY TRIED TO TOUCH THE GODS AGAIN... TO RECREATE THEM WITH SCIENCE. BUT THIS WAS FORBIDDEN.

AND THE GODS SENT A PESTILENCE. THEIR BREATH ON THE WIND. MAN'S TIME WAS DONE. THEY HAD THEIR CHANCE TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH THE LAND AND THEY FAILED.

THEN WE WERE BORN. THE HYBRID. WE ARE ONE WITH THE LAND. ONE WITH THE ANIMALS THAT WALK IT. BUT WE ALSO CARRY MANKIND'S LEGACY IN OUR BLOOD AND BONES, SO THAT WE NEVER FORGET THAT WE ARE NO BETTER THAN THEY.

WE TOO CAN FALL. WE TOO CAN FAIL. WE MUST NEVER FORGET THE FACE OF THE GODS AS MAN DID.

...FOR THEIR FACES ARE OUR FACES. AND FOR THAT WE LEAVE THIS HIDE TO FEED THE WOLVES. AN OFFERING BACK TO THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US.

AMEN.

NOW WE EAT!

CHOMP!

TELL US A STORY, DADDY!

YOU BOYS AND YOUR STORIES.

...NOT TONIGHT. IT'S ALREADY LATE.

AW, COME ON, DAD!

YEAH! COME ON! TELL US ABOUT *THE BIG MAN* AGAIN!

BIG MAN!
BIG MAN!

BIG MAN!
BIG MAN!

NO...

...NOT THAT STORY. NOT TONIGHT.

HOW ABOUT A DIFFERENT ONE INSTEAD...

"WHAT ABOUT THE STORY OF HOW WE FOUND OUR *HOME?*

"IT WAS THE EARLY DAYS OF THE HYBRID. JUST *AFTER* THE BIG MAN GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US...

"BUT AS I SAID, THIS STORY IS NOT ABOUT HIM. IT IS ABOUT ME AND YOUR MOMMY AND UNCLE BOBBY AND THE REST OF US WHEN WE WERE STILL JUST KIDS NOT MUCH OLDER THAN YOU!"

"...AFTER WE DISCOVERED THE *BIRTHPLACE OF THE HYBRID* AND WE HAD FOUGHT WHAT WE'D HOPED WOULD BE THE LAST FIGHT AGAINST MAN, WE SET OUT TO FIND A NEW HOME. A SAFE PLACE WHERE WE COULD FINALLY *STOP RUNNING.*

"IN THOSE EARLY DAYS WE ACTUALLY *STILL* USED SOME OF THE LAST MACHINES OF MAN. WE RODE IN THEIR TRUCKS, AWAY FROM ALASKA. AWAY FROM *THE COLD.*

"AND AS WE NOW KNOW, IT WASN'T LONG UNTIL THE MACHINES OF MAN STOPPED WORKING...RAN OUT OF THEIR FUEL. THE SAME FUEL THAT WAS CHOKING THE WORLD. AND WE STOPPED USING THEM ALTOGETHER.

"AND WE TOOK TO THE LAND. AND IT EMBRACED US.

"AND WE WALKED AND WALKED. FINDING OUR WAY. LIVING OFF THE LAND. WE WERE STILL TERRIFIED BACK THEN.

"WE'D SEEN SO MUCH PAIN. SO MUCH DEATH. BUT IT SEEMED THAT THE BIG MAN'S SACRIFICE HAD *CHANGED* SOMETHING. BECAUSE AS WE MADE OUR WAY, WE SAW NO MORE BAD MEN. NO ONE CHASED US. NO ONE HUNTED US.

"FOR THE FIRST TIME WE FELT *FREE.*"

I THINK THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT.
TOMORROW *WE* WALK, AND I INTEND TO GET AN EARLY START.
AW, COME ON!
TELL US MORE! TELL US HOW YOU AND *MOMMY* FELL IN LOVE!
MAYBE TOMORROW. IT'S BEDTIME. SAY GOODNIGHT TO UNCLE BOBBY.
G'NIGHT, UNCLE BOBBY!
'NIGHT, UNCLE BOBBY.
NIGHT NIGHT, MY LOVES. YOU AM HAVE GOOD DREAMS.
THOSE TWO TODAY WERE PART OF A LARGER GROUP. THEY HAD GUNS, SUPPLIES.
BOBBY AM WATCH FIRST. GUS AM NOT WORRY.

GUSSY...

YOU EVER AM TELL THE BOYS ABOUT BECKY?

NO...

"THEY DON'T NEED TO KNOW THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE *BEFORE* THEIR MOTHER."

NO POINT IN THEM KNOWING, I GUESS.

"BUT IT AM SHAME NO ONE REMEMBERS HER. SHE WAS SO NICE."

SHE WAS.

BUT THEIR MOTHER IS *THE ONE.*

GOOD NIGHT, BOBBY. WAKE ME FOR WATCH.

NIGHT, GUS. YOU AM SLEEP TIGHT.

HOW MUCH LONGER, DAD? I'M TIRED.

NOT VERY LONG. YOU BOYS DON'T KNOW WHAT *TIRED* IS. DO THEY, UNCLE BOBBY?

NO. WE AM REAL TIRED WHEN WE FIRST CAME TO HOME. RIGHT, GUS?

"WE SURE WERE.

"THE WALK HOME FROM ALASKA MAY HAVE BEEN SAFE, BUT IT WAS ALSO LONG. *VERY LONG.*

"THERE WERE DAYS WHEN I THOUGHT WE'D DIE FROM JUST BEING TIRED. AND I WAS SCARED BECAUSE I KNEW THEY WERE ALL COUNTING ON ME...

"COUNTING ON ME TO LEAD THEM HOME. BUT I SECRETLY WORRIED I'D FORGOTTEN THE WAY. THAT WE'D NEVER FIND IT.

"BUT I DIDN'T FORGET. AS SOON AS WE REACHED THOSE DEEP WOODS IT ALL CAME BACK TO ME."

N BRASKA S ATE WILDER ESS SANCTUARY

"I KNEW THOSE OLD TREES LIKE I KNEW MY OWN ANTLERS.

"THIS WAS WHERE RICHARD FAUNIN, THE MAN I KNEW AS MY FATHER, HAD RAISED ME AWAY FROM MAN'S EVIL."

"THIS WAS WHERE I'D FIRST MET THE BIG MAN. AND *THIS* WAS WHERE I LED US...HOME"

BACK THEN IT WAS JUST AN OLD CABIN, AND EVEN THAT HAD BEEN BURNT DOWN BY THE BAD MEN.

IT WAS HARD TO IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BECOME...

2012.

MY BOYS ARE HOME!

MOMMY!!

MOM! WE GOT CHASED BY MEN, BUT DADDY AND UNCLE BOBBY GOT 'EM GOOD!

YOU *DID?*

UNCLE BOBBY, WHY DON'T YOU TAKE THE BOYS UP TO THE LUNCH TENT AND GET CLEANED UP. I MADE FRESH BANNOCK AND STEW.

I WANT TO TALK TO DADDY FOR A MINUTE.

I THOUGHT YOU SAID IT WOULD BE SAFE UP THERE?

I THOUGHT IT WAS.

HADN'T SEEN ANY SCAVENGERS THAT FAR NORTH IN A LONG TIME.

IT'S THE LAST GENERATION OF THEM. THEY ARE GETTING OLD NOW. THEY'RE SCARED AND DESPERATE. THEY KNOW TIME IS RUNNING OUT.

I'M WORRIED THEY ARE GOING TO BREAK THE TRUCE... TRY SOMETHING.

WILL WE BE READY IF THEY DO?

OF COURSE. WE KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME.

DON'T BE SCARED. I WON'T LET ANYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU OR THE BOYS. YOU KNOW THAT.

I KNOW.

THIS IS A STORY.

THIS IS THE STORY OF A LITTLE BOY WITH ANTLERS WHO GREW INTO A MAN.

AND THIS IS THE STORY OF THE WOMAN WHO LOVED HIM.

BUT IT WASN'T JUST *THEIR* STORY...

THE LITTLE BOY WITH ANTLERS HAD LONG AGO STOPPED BEING ALONE AND NOW THIS WAS THE STORY OF A COMMUNITY. *A FAMILY.*

BUT THEIR VILLAGE DID NOT SPRING UP OVERNIGHT. THERE WERE MANY BATTLES. MANY LOSSES AND MUCH TO LEARN. AND THEY COULD NOT DO IT ALONE.

SO THIS WAS ALSO THE STORY OF THE MAN OF *SCIENCE* WHO THOUGHT HE WAS A *PROPHET.*

IN MANY WAYS THE DOCTOR HAD ALWAYS BEEN A LOST SOUL. BUT NEVER MORE SO THAN IN THOSE EARLY DAYS AFTER THEY ARRIVED IN THE DEEP WOODS.

HE HAD SPENT SO MUCH TIME AND SO MUCH EFFORT IN TRYING TO SOLVE THE UNSOLVABLE RIDDLE OF THE HYBRID PLAGUE THAT HE WAS LOST WITHOUT IT.

BUT IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE THE DOCTOR REALIZED HE STILL HAD A CALLING.

HE KNEW THINGS... MEDICINES AND WAYS OF MAN THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY IF THE HYBRID WERE TO THRIVE.

AND THAT IS HOW THE MAN WHO ONCE HUNTED AND DISSECTED HYBRIDS IN HOPES OF SAVING MANKIND *FINALLY* LEARNED THE TRUTH.

THAT IS HOW HE REALIZED WHAT HE WAS ALWAYS *REALLY* MEANT TO BE...NOT A SCIENTIST...NOT A SAVIOR, BUT *A TEACHER.*

SO, THIS IS ALSO THE STORY OF HOW THE MAN WHO WAS THE *MOST AFRAID* TO DIE FROM THE PLAGUE ENDED UP LIVING THE *LONGEST AND HAPPIEST* LIFE OF THEM ALL.

AND THIS IS ALSO A STORY OF FEAR. BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD GAINED SO MUCH, THE HYBRID WERE TERRIFIED THAT THEY COULD STILL LOSE IT ALL.

--WE NEED TO STAY PATIENT. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THE LAST OF THEM DIE OFF.

WE KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN. WE KNEW THEY'D BECOME MORE AND MORE DESPERATE AS THEY GREW OLDER AND THEIR RANKS THINNED.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW YOU CAN KEEP PREACHING THAT WE ***DO NOTHING***, GUS, WHEN JUST THIS MORNING ***YOUR OWN*** CHILDREN WERE ATTACKED NOT TWO DAYS FROM HERE.

BECAUSE, ALBERT, THEY ARE MORE SCARED OF ***US*** THAN WE ARE OF ***THEM***. WE ARE STRONG, YOUNG, ORGANIZED. THE HUMANS ARE WEAK AND SCATTERED AND DYING. THEY'D BE FOOLS TO COME HERE.

WE'RE THE FOOLS IF WE JUST SIT BY AND LISTEN TO THIS ANY LONGER!

THIS IS ALSO THE STORY OF A BOY RAISED IN CAPTIVITY. A BOY WHO NEVER KNEW HIS FATHER. A BOY WHO INSTEAD KNEW ONLY PAIN.

THIS BOY GREW UP SILENT, BUT SOON LEARNED TO SPEAK. AND WHEN HE DID, THE WORDS THAT EMERGED WERE FUELED BY FEAR AND HATRED.

THE HUMANS ARE COMING, BROTHERS AND SISTERS. AND IF WE LET THEM, THEY'LL BURN THIS PLACE TO THE GROUND AND SLAUGHTER OUR CHILDREN WHERE THEY SLEEP.

WE NEED TO *ATTACK.* WE NEED TO WIPE THEM OUT BEFORE THEY HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO IT TO US!

BUDDY.

THE COUNCIL WOULD BE HAPPY TO LISTEN TO YOUR ARGUMENT, IF YOU'D BOTHER TO SHOW UP ON TIME.

BUT THEN YOU ALWAYS DID LIKE A DRAMATIC ENTRANCE, DIDN'T YOU?

MY MEN AND I ARE LATE BECAUSE UNLIKE YOU, GUS, WE WERE ACTUALLY OUT KEEPING WATCH. NOT HAVING SECRET MEETINGS.

AND I DON'T NEED TO SIT AND DEBATE IT WITH YOU ANY LONGER. WE HAVE *PROOF* THAT I'M RIGHT.

A LARGE PARTY OF MEN IS ALREADY *ON THEIR WAY HERE.* WE NEED TO PREPARE.

YOU DON'T KNOW THEY MEAN TO ATTACK. THEY MIGHT JUST BE LOOKING FOR SHELTER OR SUPPLIES. WE'VE SEEN LARGE GROUPS OF HUMANS MOVING LIKE THAT BEFORE.

ARE YOU A COWARD OR JUST A FOOL, GUS? MAN HAS SHOWN TIME AND TIME AGAIN THAT THEY SEEK NOTHING MORE THAN TO WIPE US OUT.

MOST OF US GREW UP *IN CAPTIVITY.* WE SAW THE EVIL THEY ARE *REALLY* CAPABLE OF...

WE DIDN'T *ALL* HAVE THE LUXURY OF LIVING IN HIDING AND *BEING PROTECTED,* LIKE YOU WERE.

I SAW *MY SHARE* OF HORRORS TOO, BUDDY. NONE OF US GREW UP UNSCATHED.

THIS IS POINTLESS. ALL YOU DO IS TALK.

I'M TAKING A WAR PARTY OUT AT DAWN. WE'RE GOING TO HUNT THEM DOWN BEFORE THEY GET WITHIN FIFTY MILES OF THIS PLACE.

ALL OF YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US. OR YOU CAN STAY HERE AND WAIT TO DIE. THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

AND THEY DID CHOOSE. SIDES WERE TAKEN, BECAUSE THIS BOY'S ANGER AND HATRED WERE CONTAGIOUS.

THIS IS A STORY OF HOW THAT HATRED INFECTED THE HYBRID AS IT ONCE DID MAN.

AND THIS IS THE STORY OF MAN'S DESPERATE LAST GASP.

THIS IS A STORY OF WAR.

THE FINAL WAR.

KILL THEM ALL!

AND LIKE ALL WAR STORIES THIS ONE IS ABOUT DEATH AND LOSS.

UNGH!

WHAM

NO!

--KILL YOU!!

FWIP

--ACK!

THIS IS ALSO THE STORY OF BROTHERS.

BROTHERS SWORN TO PROTECT ONE ANOTHER, NO MATTER WHAT.

GUS!

YOU WERE RIGHT. THEY'LL NEVER STOP ATTACKING US.

UNLESS WE OFFER THEM ANOTHER CHOICE.

YOU ARE BEATEN.

YOU ARE HUNGRY AND SICK AND DYING.

BUT IT DOESN'T *HAVE* TO BE LIKE THIS. NOT ANY-MORE...

AND THIS IS A STORY OF COMPASSION.

THIS IS A STORY OF HOW THE LAST HUMANS STOPPED FIGHTING AND CAME TO THE HYBRIDS NOT AS ENEMIES...

BUT RATHER AS REFUGEES.

THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW THE HYBRIDS *LET* GO OF FEAR AND HATRED.

AND, DESPITE BEING HUNTED AND HATED THEMSELVES...

...STILL HELPED MANKIND IN THEIR ***FINAL PASSAGE*** OUT OF THIS WORLD.

THIS IS ALSO A STORY OF REMEMBRANCE.

BECAUSE THEY KNEW, TO FORGET HOW THEY HAD GOTTEN HERE--TO FORGET THE *SACRIFICES* MADE TO GET THEM HERE--WOULD MEAN TO REPEAT THE MISTAKES OF MAN.

DESPITE THEIR DIFFERENCES--DESPITE THEIR *SCARS*--THEY ALL STOOD TOGETHER ONCE A YEAR AND REMEMBERED.

THEY REMEMBERED THEIR FATHERS AND THEY REMEMBERED THEMSELVES.

THEY WEREN'T JUST STRANGERS BOUND BY HISTORY AND FATE...

...THEY WERE FAMILY.

AND THIS WAS THEIR STORY.

YOU'RE QUIET TONIGHT.

I'M FINE. JUST... THINKING.

WHAT'S WRONG?

NOTHING. ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.

I THINK FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY ENTIRE LIFE THERE IS NO BATTLE ON THE HORIZON. NOWHERE TO RUN AND NOTHING TO RUN FROM.

YOU MAKE IT SOUND LIKE A BAD THING.

NO. I JUST FEEL A BIT LOST IS ALL.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

NOW?

NOW *WE LIVE.*

HE'D BE PROUD OF YOU, GUS.

HE'D BE PROUD OF ALL OF US.

I KNOW.

COME ON. DANCE WITH ME.

IN A MINUTE... I JUST--

I JUST WANT TO WATCH FOR A WHILE.

THIS IS A STORY OF FAMILY.

THIS IS A STORY OF PEACE.

AND THIS IS A STORY OF HAPPINESS.

BUT THE STORY DIDN'T END HERE. IN FACT IT WAS REALLY ONLY JUST BEGINNING...

THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW THE TWO LITTLE BOYS GREW UP THEMSELVES AND WENT OFF TO SEE THE WORLD.

AND AS GUS WATCHED HIS SONS GO, HE LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING. HE STARTED TO BELIEVE THAT THE PEACE THEY'D ALL FOUGHT SO HARD FOR MAY JUST LAST.

WENDY WAS RIGHT. IT WAS TIME FOR THE HYBRID TO LIVE. TO ***THRIVE.*** AND THAT IS JUST WHAT THEY DID.

THE BOYS SPENT YEARS ON THE ROAD, EXPLORING THE LOST CITIES OF MAN, SCAVENGING FOR TREASURE AND SEEING THE OLD WAYS FIRSTHAND.

AND UNLIKE WHEN ***THEIR FATHER*** HAD TRAVELED OUT INTO THE WORLD, THEY WERE ***FREE.***

THEN THEY RETURNED ADULTS. AND BROUGHT WITH THEM NOT JUST STORIES, BUT SURVIVORS FROM OTHER HYBRID COMMUNITIES ALL ACROSS THE CONTINENT.

AND HE KNEW THAT THEY NO LONGER NEEDED TO RELY ON HIM. THAT THE HYBRID HAD GROWN BEYOND HIM, AND WOULD ENDURE WITHOUT HIM. HE COULD FINALLY REST.

AND THIS REST BROUGHT NEW BLESSINGS AS HIS CHILDREN STARTED TO BUILD SOMETHING OF THEIR OWN.

SO THIS IS A STORY OF GENERATIONS.

SONS BECAME FATHERS.

PARENTS BECAME *GRANDPARENTS.*

AND STILL THE STORY GOES ON...

TELL US A STORY, GRANDPA!

YOU KIDS AND YOUR STORIES!

YES. HE DID...

"JEPPERD. HIS NAME WAS JEPPERD. AND HE WAS A *GOOD MAN.*

"HE *PROTECTED* ME."

HE PROTECTED *ALL OF US.*

AND THAT'S WHY WE HAVE THIS HARVEST CELEBRATION EVERY YEAR. TO *REMEMBER HIM,* AND EVERYTHING HE DID SO THAT WE COULD BE FREE.

ALL RIGHT, YOU TWO. IT'S ALREADY LATE AND YOUR GRANDPA IS TIRED.

BESIDES, WE SHOULD GET GOING IF YOU WANT TO SEE THE FESTIVAL BEFORE BED.

HOLD ON. I GOT SOMETHING HERE FOR YOU...

ONE FOR EACH OF YOU.

SIGH--YOU'LL SPOIL THEM, DAD.

THAT'S MY JOB, SON.

LET'S GO, DAD! THE DANCE IS STARTING!

WE'RE COMING, WE'RE COMING!

YOU WANT HELP, DAD?

NO, NO...I'M FINE.

YOU GET GOING, DON'T WANT YOU TO MISS ANYTHING.

YOU COMING?

SOON. JUST GOING TO SIT HERE FOR A MINUTE.

ALL RIGHT, ONE STORY. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO HEAR, THEN?

THE BIG MAN! TELL US ABOUT THE BIG MAN!!

GRANDPA, HOW COME WE JUST CALL HIM BIG MAN? DIDN'T HE HAVE A REAL NAME?

WELL, DON'T SIT TOO LONG. YOU STILL OWE ME A DANCE, REMEMBER?

I WON'T.

THIS IS A STORY.

THIS IS A STORY OF A LITTLE BOY WITH ANTLERS AND A BIG MAN WITH GUNS WHO FOUND EACH OTHER AND LEARNED THAT THERE WAS STILL SOME GOOD LEFT IN THE WORLD...

THIS IS A STORY OF SURVIVAL AGAINST ALL ODDS AND FINDING SOMETHING WORTH FIGHTING FOR IN EVEN THE DARKEST OF TIMES.

THIS IS A STORY OF FEAR AND FRIENDSHIP.

THIS IS A STORY OF PASSAGE AND REBIRTH.

BUT THIS IS ALSO A STORY OF SACRIFICE AND REDEMPTION.

A STORY OF HATRED AND LOVE.

THIS IS A STORY OF INNOCENCE AND AGE.

THIS IS A STORY...

OH!

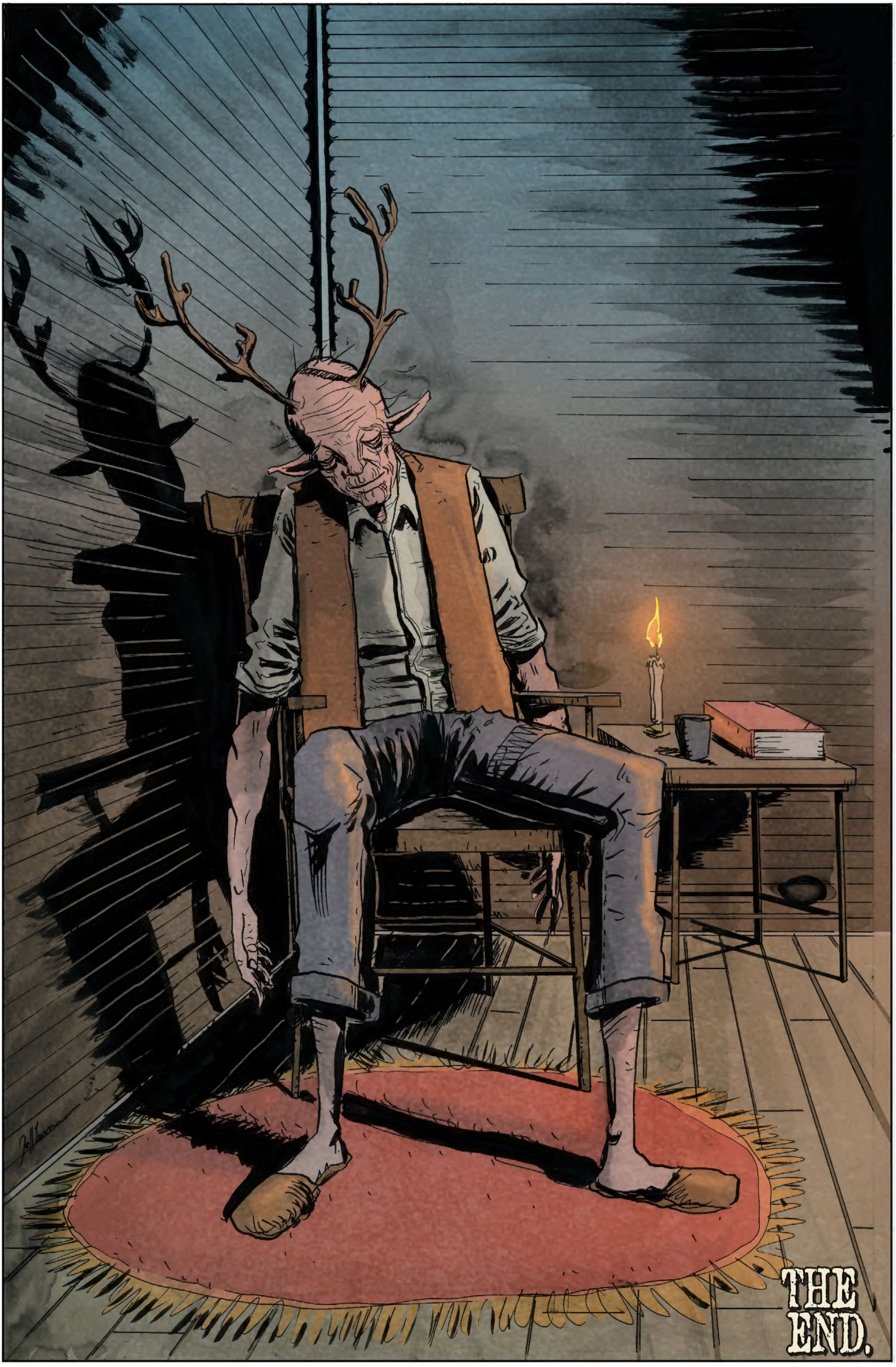
THIS IS A STORY.

THIS IS A STORY.

THIS IS A STORY.

THIS IS A STORY.

THIS IS A STORY.


THE END.

SWEET TOOTH #40
Variant Cover by Timothy Truman

TRUMAN

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And, if no cure can be found, death for *everyone*.

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